Western Illinois Regional Studies

Fall 1991
Special issue:
Edgar Lee Masters

WESTERN ILLINOIS REGIONAL STUDIES

Published annually by
the College of Arts and Sciences
at Western Illinois University
Macomb, Illinois 61455

BOARD OF EDITORS

JAY R. BALDERSON
DONALD W. GRIFFIN
GORDANA REZAB
ROBERT P. SUTTON
JOHN E. HALLWAS, *Chairman*

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

DAVID D. ANDERSON, *Michigan State University*
MICHAEL BECKES, *United States Forest Service*
RICHARD W. CROCKETT, *Western Illinois University*
JAMES E. DAVIS, *Illinois College*
RODNEY DAVIS, *Knox College*
ARLIN D. FENTEM, *Western Illinois University*
MYRON J. FOGDE, *Augustana College*
FRANK W. GOUDY, *Western Illinois University*
THOMAS E. HELM, *Western Illinois University*
ROBERT JOHANNSEN, *University of Illinois*
FREDERICK G. JONES, *Western Illinois University*
JERRY KLEIN, *"Peoria Journal Star"*
CHARLES W. MAYER, *Western Illinois University*
DENNIS Q. McINERNY, *College of St. Thomas*
RONALD E. NELSON, *Bishop Hill Heritage Association*
RONALD E. NELSON, *Western Illinois University*
STUART STRUEVER, *Northwestern University*
ROALD D. TWEET, *Augustana College*
WILLIAM L. URBAN, *Monmouth College*
ELLEN M. WHITNEY, *Editor emeritus,*
"Journal of the Illinois Historical Society"
DOUGLAS WILSON, *Knox College*

Single back issues are $4.00 plus postage. Articles published in *WIRS* are listed in the *MLA International Bibliography, America: History and Life,* and other appropriate bibliographies.

Correspondence about back issues or other matters should be sent to the Chairman of the Board of Editors, *Western Illinois Regional Studies,* Tillman Hall 413, Western Illinois University, Macomb, Illinois 61455.

WESTERN ILLINOIS REGIONAL STUDIES

Volume XIV **Fall 1991** **Number 2**

CONTENTS

Special Issue: Edgar Lee Masters

Sandridge: A Masters Landscape Revisited
Charles E. Burgess 5

Oakland Cemetery in Petersburg
Julie Scott 35

Oak Hill Cemetery in Lewistown
Marjorie Rich Bordner 53

Edgar Lee Masters' "Finest Achievement": *Domesday Book*
Herbert Russell 65

Missed by Modernism: The Literary Friendship of Arthur Davidson Ficke and Edgar Lee Masters
Marcia Noe 71

Reviews of Books 81

Contributors 87

Copyright 1991 by Western Illinois University

Cover: The photograph of Masters, taken at about the time *Spoon River Anthology* appeared, is courtesy of the Illinois State Historical Library.

Notice: With this issue *Western Illinois Regional Studies* ceases publication. However, back issues will be available at the editorial address.

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

Thacker, THE GREAT PRAIRIE FACT AND LITERARY IMAGINATION
By Jay R. Balderson 81

Sublett, PAPER COUNTIES: THE ILLINOIS EXPERIENCE, 1825-1867
By Ronald E. Nelson 82

Hoffman, A GUIDE TO THE HISTORY OF ILLINOIS
By John E. Hallwas 84

Russell, THE ENDURING RIVER: EDGAR LEE MASTERS' UNCOLLECTED SPOON RIVER POEMS
By Charles E. Burgess 85

SANDRIDGE: A MASTERS LANDSCAPE REVISITED

Charles E. Burgess

The locale where Edgar Lee Masters stored his earliest memories stimulated a voluminous amount of poetry and prose produced over a sixty-year period. The Sandridge vicinity of northwest Menard County contains about thirty-five square miles of typical Central Illinois farmland, with predominantly level prairie interspersed with gentle hills, small streams and groves. The Sangamon River, by means of a sharp bend, forms the eastern and northern boundaries. The county seat of Petersburg is to the south. At the western edge is the Chicago and Illinois Midland Railway (the Springfield and Northwestern in Masters' youth). Illinois Rt. 97 now parallels the tracks, but no roadway existed there until the mid-1930's. Except for the tiny villages of Atterberry and Oakford on the western side, Sandridge has remained a place of farms with little of the alterations of subdividers.[1]

Formally, as in the survey designation of the larger portion of the Sandridge region as an administrative division of the county, the legal name is "Sand Ridge." Virtually all regional writings about it, and those of Masters, use the contracted form. I will adhere to the tradition. The usage came smoothly in the speech of settlers of southern origins, as did the designation "precincts" for what would be called townships in other counties.

The area Masters called "Sandridge" in his Rivers of America volume, *The Sangamon* (1942), is much more than the thirty-six sections of Township 19 North, Range 7 West, which form Sand Ridge Precinct. Eastern sections of Oakford and Atterberry precincts and northern North Petersburg Precinct are included in what he described as "my nurturing spot of earth" and "my spiritual home."

Sandridge had been settled about sixty years when Masters first came to it in 1869 at age one. The name was drawn from the sand mounds mixing through the fertile loam, according to one of its first historians, the Rev. R. D. Miller. The fields were abundant in corn, clover, and wheat. Cattle and horses thrived in rich pastures. At intervals along the network of narrow roads were farm houses, variously imposing or modest, near large barns. Often, family burial grounds were nearby, sometimes well-kept, sometimes overgrown. Oakford and Atterberry were not in existence until the railroad came in 1872; Petersburg and the soon-to-vanish Robinson's Mills (Bobtown) had the nearest stores and village industries. Sandridge's only "public" structures were scattered country churches and schools where neighborhood social life took place as well as worship and instruction.

It is unnecessary to review all the acknowledgements that Masters made of the impact of the Sandridge style of life on his creative impulses. They are in the vein of what he said in a 1933 *American Mercury* article, "The Genesis

of *Spoon River*," about the influence of the pastoral milieu as background for his masterpiece, *Spoon River Anthology* (1915-16): "As I spent all the Summers of my boyhood at the Masters farm I stored up memories which were at last to be sung in the most joyous part of the Anthology." He could have just as accurately been describing the impetus for hundreds of his other poems and prose passages, especially nostalgic works of his last productive years. In them, those with any familiarity with northwest Menard County will find familiar family names with recognizable traits, episodes, and landscape references. Sometimes, as in "New Hope Meetinghouse," first published in *The University Review* in 1937, there is virtually a procession of personages from in and around Sandridge: "Greenberry Atterberry whose voice with feeling trembled," Malkom Hubley, Samuel Blivens, George Spear, Elvira Momeyer, Smoot, Craig, Alkire, John McNamar, Parthenia Clute, "Orphics of the Illinois prairies . . . Goodpastures, Clarys . . . . Royal Potter whose thundering tones overflowed the church . . . ." The names are authentic, as are the qualities of the people—at least as Masters remembered them—in the late works, whereas in *Spoon River Anthology* the matching is not always as precise. The *Anthology's* "Aaron Hatfield," for example, is clearly recognized as a portrait of Masters' grandfather rather than of a neighbor so named.

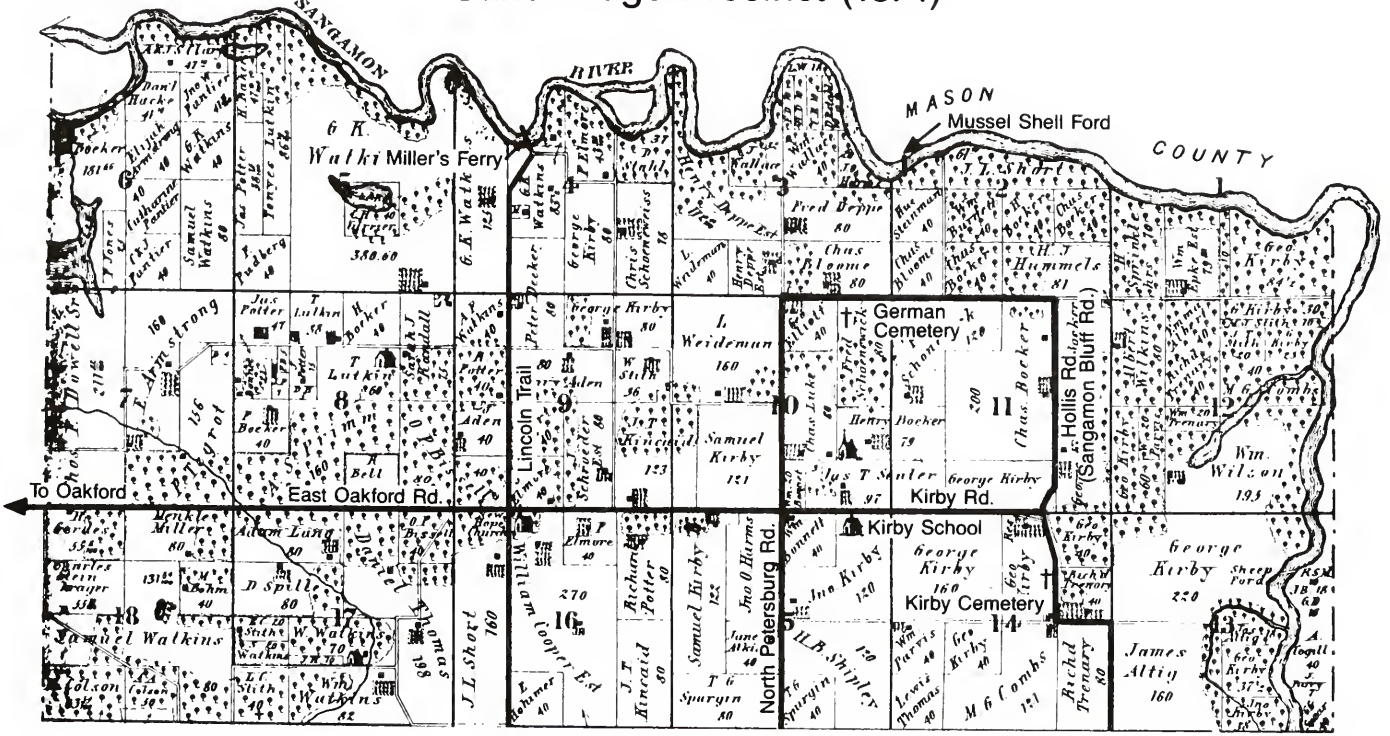
Discovering the lore behind the poem is one of the fascinations in study of regionally-grounded authors like Masters. As Ronald Primeau commented in the introduction to a 1991 University of Illinois Press reprinting of *Across Spoon River*, there is "the persistent allure of learning how *Spoon River Anthology* was conceived and coaxed through its incubation." The later works are in different poetic styles, but in them also is found what Masters conceived to be the high purposes of his poetry—truthful portrayal of the human condition, advocacy for agrarian values and Jeffersonian ideals, and celebration of nature. In the process, he might profile individuals such as his beloved grandparents, the vigorous and blasphemous neighbor George Kirby, or the stoic hired man Bill Schultz. That these were real individuals adds interest for many who encounter Masters' writings.

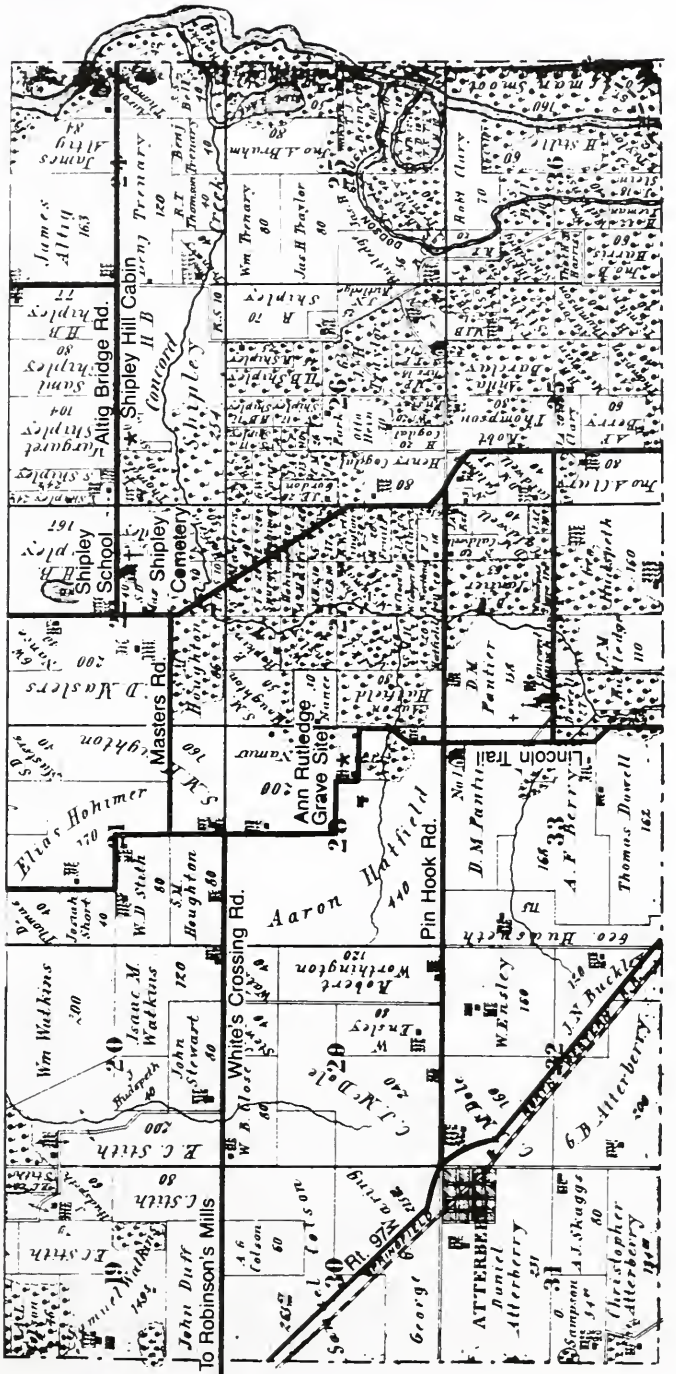
However, it is not my purpose to deal in detail with various identifications and speculations. There is no shortage of this approach to Masters in both popular and scholarly analyses. The exercise of linking Masters' characters to real persons of Menard or Fulton counties had been going on for three-quarters of a century. My aim is to give some assistance to readers who want to know more about Masters by getting to know the territory of Sandridge.

While the same focus could be put on other places where Masters lived and worked—Petersburg, Lewistown, Chicago, New York and some other rural areas—Sandridge can hold a special interest. That is because he lived in Sandridge first, except for a year of personally unremembered babyhood at his birthplace in Kansas. More importantly, of places where he lived, Sandridge probably is the least changed from the period when he knew it directly in the last three decades of the 19th century. In contrast, in Petersburg and in Lewistown in Fulton County, the villages of his boyhood, he might

Petersburg Precinct (1874)
Old Concord Cemetery
Lincoln Trail
Rt. 97
Fairgrounds Rds
Bowman Lane
Grosboll Rd
Alterberry Farm
Rt. 97

Sand Ridge Precinct (1874)




Shipley Hill Cabin
Altig Bridge Rd.
Shipley School
Shipley Cemetery
Masters Rd.
Ann Rutledge Grave Site
Lincoln Trail
Pin Hook Rd.
White's Crossing Rd.
To Robinson's Mills
Rt. 97
Concord
Shipley
Aaron Hatfield
Elias Hohimer
Wm Watkins
Isaac M. Watkins
John Stewart
E. C. Stith
John Duff
Robert Worthington
C. J. McDole
W. Ensley
J. N. Buckley
G. B. Atterberry
Thomas Dowell
A. F. Berry
D. M. Pantier
Wm Trenary
Jas H Traylor
Robt Clary
Thompson
Henry Cogdal
Hudspeth
Hatfield
Nance
Houghton
S. M. Houghton
D. Masters
Josiah Short
W. D. Stith
Wm Trenary
James Altig
Samuel Watkins
George Waring
Daniel Atterberry
Christopher Atterberry
A. J. Skaggs
Sampson
ATTERBERRY

find a few residences recognizable but public and commercial buildings have been replaced or much altered. Sweeping changes mark the cities. The same kinds of family ties and neighborhood connections as Sandridge offered did not exist for him in Fulton County, where he grew to manhood. Consequently few of his poems use rural lore of Fulton. Most of those are about the Spoon River hamlet of Bernadotte, with its picturesque mill, dam, and covered bridge. Only the river and hills remained somewhat as Masters saw them after conversion of the area into a World War II military camp.

In Sandridge, a comparison of modern maps of the road network and those shown in the 1874 *Illustrated Atlas Map of Menard County, Illinois* shows remarkably little change. Few of Sandridge's roads were graveled and oiled before the 1940's. Many still are narrow with stretches that are more sand than hard surface. Creeks like Concord and Latimore, slowly flowing through pastures and brush, are situated as Masters saw them. Serene Concord and Old Concord (Goodpasture) cemeteries no longer serve congregations, but are still much in evidence. So are some of the small burial grounds, such as the one that Masters described in "George Kirby," about the blustering neighbor who "lived to bury wife and every child and build this picket fence here in the meadow." A lot of the names on today's mailboxes would be familiar to Masters (as they are to local readers of his poetry): Shipley, Hollis, Kirby, Schirding, Armstrong, Grosboll, Wilken, Meyer, Pettit. Many of the houses and barns to be seen in Master's youth are gone, but their successors usually are at the same sites. The churches and schools have vanished—burned, remodeled into houses, moved to serve as cribs—but foundation stones and clear areas remain as evidence of places where grandparents Squire Davis and Lucinda Masters worshiped with neighbors, and where their children sat before country teachers, and themselves taught.

The main differences developed during the twentieth century include establishment of Illinois Rt. 97, northwesterly from Petersburg, as the straight main route to Havana in Mason County. A meandering way through some of the roads to be described later had to be taken before this "Military Highway" was completed as a national defense measure. Earlier, bridging and dredging of the lower Sangamon led to disappearance of ferry and ford locations. Gone, too, are most of the small lakes and sloughs that offered good fishing and hunting for Masters and his Uncle Will—silted or filled to the point where their boundaries are evident only during flood season. In late visits, some familiar landscape features such as the Latimore eluded Masters, as he recounted in *The Sangamon*. But there was still the Mason County hills defining the northern boundary, breaking the sweep of fields and sky with an unchanged image. They do the same today. The experience of landscape was a benefaction of the Sandridge area to Masters' writings. The later visitor can appreciate this by seeing the same vistas.

The name of one man who came to Sandridge as a visitor is forever linked to the region, and to Masters' treatment of it. As Masters and many others have recorded, the young Abraham Lincoln, living in nearby New Salem,

surveyed farms and prospective towns in Sandridge. He tried his first case at law in the Concord community, often stayed overnight with John and Hannah Armstrong or other friends, and—legend has it—mourned near the cabin where death came to his stricken sweetheart, Anna (family usage Ann) Rutledge. The first grave of "Anne Rutledge," the subject of Masters' most celebrated poem, "beneath these weeds" of Old Concord Cemetery, was along a route from the Masters farm to Petersburg. Such "Lincoln locations" were impressed on the boy's mind. They appear across the spectrum of his poetry and prose, acknowledging Lincoln's fame but maintaining that it was an outgrowth of the influence of other pioneers and contemporaries such as his own grandfather. Faded signs from Works Progress Administration times along Sandridge roads mark a portion of the "Lincoln National Memorial Highway," but it is largely unvisited by the throngs that crowd New Salem, just south of Petersburg. Calling attention to these Lincoln locations in reference to Masters' treatment of them is a further justification for compiling a brief gazetteer of Sandridge.

Spoon River Anthology often is categorized as village-centered work. It is that, but about fifty of the "epitaphs" concern farm life in Central Illinois. While the harshness that could be part of rural living is not ignored by Masters, most of his farm characters are in comfortable circumstances. Their musings are about matters deeper than the drudgery of day-to-day existence. The same approach is found in most of the late poems. In "The Prairie: Sandridge" (ca. 1942):

> Kincaid, McDoel, Ensley, Watkins, Miles,
> Houghton and Masters speak here as the Muse
> Of this domain, they whisper of toil, of mirth
> In the gracious days . . . .

A skeptic might suggest that Masters would have had a less euphoric concept of rural life if he had spent his entire boyhood rather than holidays in farm work. As it was, he came to the Masters farm in Sandridge as a guest and favored grandson during some weekends and summers. But it should not be overlooked that he also was a resident during a period of infancy when, as he summarized in *Across Spoon River*, "the pinch of hard life" was felt.

Failing to establish a law practice during about a year-and-a-half in Kansas, Hardin Wallace Masters, wife Emma and year-old Edgar Lee returned to Squire Davis Masters' farm in Sandridge in late summer, 1869. They lived in the vicinity for a little more than three years, until Hardin, elected Menard County state's attorney in November, 1872, moved his family to Petersburg. Masters' account of the Sandridge residence period in *Across Spoon River* was mostly based on what he was told by his parents and grandparents. It would be speculative, but probably correct, to suggest that some impressions from babyhood remained in his unconscious to be utilized along with actual memories.

After living briefly on the family farm, the Hardin Masters family moved a mile east to land rented for them by Squire Davis Masters on Shipley Hill. Edgar Lee Masters described the house as a "cabin." Besides farming, Hardin taught during winter months at Kirby School, walking two miles across fields. The family was there when the census taker came in June 1870, and, according to Masters' autobiography, when his sister Madeline was born on August 18, 1870. Meanwhile, Squire Davis Masters had sought to make an easier life for his son by purchasing 118 acres just south of the future site of Atterberry. Menard County Deed Book 23, page 28, shows the acquisition on April 30, 1870, from Greenberry and Jennie Atterberry. The Hardin Masters family move to it probably took place in late 1870 or early 1871. This is the location of Edgar Lee Masters' first memories. He recalled, in *Across Spoon River*, a house set well back from the front fence, a spacious back yard, spring fires as his father burned stalks, and most of all the flatness of the terrain. The Atterberry farm is a logical place to begin a survey of what survives from Masters' Sandridge environment.

THE ATTERBERRY FARM

The late Edith Masters, a cousin of the poet, confirmed for me various Sandridge locations including the Atterberry farm house site. It is most easily reached by leaving Rt. 97 at Atterberry, going one mile on the first south-bound road to a crossroads, and then one-quarter mile east. Modern plat books shows the owners of the land that Hardin Masters farmed as Helen Carter and Elmer Behrends. The present two-story house is at the end of a short lane, north of the east-west road. It appears to be of undistinguished early twentieth-century construction. However, a tenant, Edward Heyen, told me in 1970 that a much earlier structure was incorporated, probably what Masters described as a "common house." The fertile land around it is as Masters remembered it, "level as a table, rimmed far off with strips of forest"—a recurring image in his late poetry.

"Atterberry" was the surname Masters used for a family much like his own in the novel *The Tide of Time* (1937). The village was just coming into existence as the railroad was completed during 1872, a year when the Masters family is known to have occupied the nearby farm. The store operated by the Clary family, much visited by Edgar Lee as a boy, was the nearest such facility to the Squire Davis Masters farm. Atterberry's station was where teen-age Edgar Lee made train connections to and from Lewistown during summer visits to the Masters farm. Though Squire Davis Masters maintained membership at the Methodist Church in Petersburg, he is credited by his grandson in *The Sangamon* with helping build "a little church" in Atterberry. Any remnants of this structure have not been located. It probably was the predecessor to "McDole Chapel" Methodist church built ca. 1892, burned 1922, according to Menard church histories. Little remains in the shrunken village today from its busy decades.

BOWMAN'S LANE

The name applies to the straight, level first mile of the shortest route, about five miles, between Petersburg and the Masters farm. A concordance of place and family names in Masters' books could be constructed from nomenclature along this route. Today the entire north-south length is marked "North Petersburg Road." When an abrupt westward turn occurs at Bonnett's Corner in northern Sandridge the signs change to "East Oakford Road."

In Masters' youth, the road leaving Petersburg climbed a steep hill, passing beside Estill, Brahm, and Robbins property. There was a sharp turn north near the stately James Miles home as the route properly became Bowman's Lane, named for an early landowner, George Bowman (1788-1874). Miles (1822-1913) was a friend of Squire Davis Masters and namesake (but not model) for the narrator of Edgar Lee Masters' novel about early Illinois politics, *Children of the Market Place* (1922). The hill route still exists, but the usual turn-off now to Bowman Lane is from Rt. 97 at the top of the hill just south of the Miles house. It now is occupied by Richard Schafer. The Menard County Fairgrounds remains on the east side of Bowman Lane. In Masters' youth, the Schirding family owned most of the other land on both sides of Bowman Lane, and descendants still do.

The North Petersburg Road, now the main hard surface route through eastern Sandridge, jogs slightly to the west over slight elevations before crossing Concord Creek, just south of the Masters farm. Before the road was widened and straightened, this leg passed through a thickly-wooded mile, and was called the Timber Road.

THE LINCOLN TRAIL

The other frequent route from Petersburg to the Masters farm could add many more names to the concordance. It parallels North Petersburg Road, generally about three-fourths mile west. County highway signs mark the route as The Lincoln Trail, along with surviving Lincoln National Memorial Highway markers. Southern access is from Route 97 midway between Petersburg and Atterberry. In earliest decades of Sandridge, what is now Lincoln Trail was part of the main route between Springfield, Havana, Lewistown, and Galena via Miller's Ferry at the Sangamon. As a public road now, it ends about one-half mile north of where it crosses East Oakford Road.

Edgar Lee Masters, in *The Sangamon*, describes riding along the south part of the route now called Lincoln Trail with his grandfather and grandmother. Going this way in the 1870's, farms that would be passed included many whose owners names would be preserved in Masters' writings: Sevigna (Sevigne in *Spoon River Anthology*) Houghton, John McNamar, Aaron Hatfield, D. M. Pantier, A. F. Berry, James McGrady Rutledge, and Rev. Abram H. Goodpasture. A famous but now little-visited burial ground is the first landmark for the northbound traveler on Lincoln Trail.

OLD CONCORD (GOODPASTURE) CEMETERY

The historic cemetery is on a pasture slope about one quarter mile east of the public road. It can be reached via a field lane by turning just before the Lincoln Trail crosses Concord Creek, a trickling branch at this stage. Another approach is by a lane from the house of Kermit Grosboll, current owner of the land. The Grosboll house, which dates from the period when the land was owned by James McGrady Rutledge (1814-1899), cousin of Ann, is reached by turning west from North Petersburg Road on Fairgrounds Road, then north on Grosboll Road to Kermit Grosboll's lane.

Grass, including some original prairie strains, grows high in Old Concord Cemetery, but it is sturdily fenced and the Grosbolls and other families with an interest in its history have maintained it. A condition that it shares with several area cemeteries not in active use is that some bodies have been moved to Petersburg cemeteries, creating the situation where markers for the same individuals can be found in two places. The land around Old Concord was one of the first areas settled in what is now Menard County. Samuel Berry in 1826 was the first owner of the tract that includes the cemetery site. Ten years later, Squire Berry's nearby home was the site of the hearing in a bastardy suit at which Lincoln in his first trial activity, coming from a surveying job, gave successful counsel to the plaintiff.

Old Concord was the burial place of Ann Rutledge from her death in 1835 until 1890 when supposed remains were moved to Petersburg's Oakland Cemetery. The rough stone marker that Masters saw as a boy apparently was removed by a souvenir hunter. A waist-high red sign with yellow lettering identifies her Old Concord gravesite, next to the surviving stone for her brother David, the first attorney to practice in Menard County after its formation in 1839. The cemetery was in most active use when the property was owned by the Rev. Abram H. Goodpasture (1822-85), pastor of Concord Church, hence the alternate name. Nearly all pioneer names of the region are represented on Old Concord's markers. One example that intrigued Masters into a description, in *The Sangamon*, was the stone for John Clary (1793-1860), believed to have been in 1819 the first white settler within present bounds of Menard County. The engraving, reflecting Clary's reputation as a huntsman, is of a rifle-toting figure gesturing to a dog. It remains in excellent condition.

CONCORD CEMETERY-CHURCH SITE

Masters used Concord Church as a symbol of the worth and waning of agrarian neighborliness in writings spanning a half-century. The site is a mile north of Old Concord Cemetery near Lincoln Trail on an east-west connecting road (unmarked in summer 1991) to North Petersburg Road. The devout Methodist Squire Davis Masters and his family, including grandson Edgar Lee, nevertheless frequently attended the Cumberland Presbyterian church, the nearest (two miles) place of worship to the Masters farm. "Aaron Hatfield"

On the left, Bowman Lane, looking north from Fairgrounds Road. On the right, the marker for John Clary, the first settler of Menard County territory, in the Old Concord Cemetery.
(All the photographs in this article are courtesy of Charles Burgess.)

Gravesite of Ann Rutledge with marker for her brother David Rutledge, in Old Concord (Goodpasture) Cemetery.

The more recent Concord Cemetery, looking north. The Concord Church was in the clear space on the right, behind the concrete sidewalk.

The more recent Concord Cemetery, looking northwest over a field that was part of the Daniel Pantier farm.

The site of the cabin of James Rutledge, where Ann Rutledge died.

of *Spoon River Anthology* is a monologue portraying the grandfather in brooding worship. Masters wrote a great deal about the church, its members and the surviving cemetery in *The Sangamon*, quoting several of his own poems on the subject. He confirmed that the content of "New Hope Meeting House"—a historic Baptist church still active on East Oakford Road—is really about Concord.

Church historians say the Concord congregation was the first established in Sandridge, in 1826, by the Rev. John Berry, brother of Samuel. Originally the clear space was a camp meeting ground. Three church buildings were in use at various times at the site between 1830 and 1914. The one Masters knew was a roomy frame structure, built in the mid-1860's and remodeled about 1900. It was sketched for *The Sangamon* from old photographs. Although it apparently was damaged by fire, a portion stood until the lumber was removed in 1933 for reconstruction of a home in the Menard village of Greenview. Only a concrete walk remains. Most of the majestic cedars and elms that shaded the cemetery as recently as twenty-five years ago are gone, but the grounds are fenced and well-maintained. Except for the Masters family (their burials are in Oakland Cemetery, Petersburg), most neighborhood families are represented by the stones—names that would be familiar to readers of *Spoon River Anthology* and many of Masters' others books.

SITE OF JAMES RUTLEDGE CABIN

Continuing north, the most famous site in Sandridge Lincoln lore along Lincoln Trail is found about one-half mile north of the intersection with Pin Hook Road (which leads west to Atterberry). Lincoln Trail turns sharply west for the length of the yard of a large frame house of nineteenth century vintage. The land was owned during Masters' boyhood by elderly farmer-merchant John McNamar, who allegedly jilted Ann Rutledge. After McNamar's death in 1879, the occupant was his retarded son William, for whom Squire Davis Masters was guardian. Later the Shirding and Hollis families owned the land; the present occupant is Steve Hollis. For at least 40 years a large white sign in the yard has summed up the Lincoln connection. The text:

> ANN RUTLEDGE HOME — ON THIS VERY SPOT STOOD THE LOG CABIN IN WHICH ANN RUTLEDGE DIED, AUGUST 25, 1835. ON THE HILLSIDE TO THE WEST STOOD A LARGE OAK UNDER WHICH ABRAHAM LINCOLN WEPT BITTERLY AFTER LEAVING THE SICK ROOM OF ANN RUTLEDGE, WHERE THEIR LAST COMMUNION WAS HELD.

Ann's father, James Rutledge (also buried in Old Concord), had operated mills on Concord Creek and at New Salem before becoming McNamar's tenant in 1833. Although Masters made immortal poetic use of Ann Rutledge traditions, he came to characterize them in *The Sangamon* as "charming fables."

ROBINSON'S MILLS

North about one-half mile on Lincoln Trail, a T-intersection is located where White's Crossing Road goes directly west. Sandridge farmers of Squire Davis Masters' neighborhood used this route to Robinson's Mills, popularly called "Bobtown." It was a four-mile drive from the Masters farm, close to where an early ford over Clary's Creek gave the road its name. A mill existed at the site as early as 1826. Lincoln surveyed nearby roads. The mill was upgraded in the late 1830's by Ebenezer Robinson, who also built a handsome brick inn. Robinson's Mills experienced rapid business and resident decline when the railroad passed about one mile east in 1872 and Oakford and Atterberry developed. Some commerce remained into the mid-1870's when a very young Edgar Lee Masters accompanied his grandfather to the wagon repair shop and was treated to candy and gum at the general store. "Bobtown was a thing of wonder to me," Masters recalled in *The Sangamon*.

The Robinson's Mills site is reached more easily now by turning west on White's Crossing Road where it crosses Rt. 97. An intersection with Bobtown Road is the location of the vanished village. Today the only visible business is an auto salvage yard. In the creek valley, the 1842 Robinson Inn—now usually called Bonnett's Inn after later owner John Bonnett—survives, pleasingly restored by the Conrad Gebhards family.

THE MASTERS FARM

A quarter mile beyond the White's Crossing intersection, a three-quarter mile east-west road connects the Lincoln Trail with North Petersburg Road. Now marked Masters Road, its eastern half borders the south side of the Masters farm, now listed as containing 154 acres in Menard County plat books. The road, in some form, has probably existed since settlement, but is not apparent on the 1874 *Illustrated Atlas Map*. That source shows 320 acres owned by Squire Davis Masters at the time. The land making up the present farm has been owned since 1847 by Squire Davis Masters (died 1904) and Lucinda (died 1910) or descendants—son Wilbourne (died 1952), and his daughter Edith Masters (died 1972). Currently it is administered as part of Edith's estate, assigned by her will for his lifetime to Irwin Knoles, the tenant for nearly fifty years. In recent years, renters—now Ed and Joyce Troxell—have operated the farm. Although Edgar Lee Masters never owned the land, apparently an interest in it will go to his surviving son, Hilary, after Knoles' death.

Readers can find many idealized descriptions of the farm, its buildings and the landscape as it existed in Edgar Lee Masters' boyhood in his autobiographical works and novels. The house that Squire Davis Masters built, to replace the cabin that came with the first purchase, burned in the early 1920's. The main barn suffered the same fate in the mid-1940's. Knoles believes a dilapidated "buggy shed," now used to store lumber, is the only building dating to Squire Davis Masters' lifetime. Now-straight Masters Road

The Masters Road, at the site of the Sevigne Houghton home, looking northeast. From this point the road formerly ran close to the house of Squire Davis and Lucinda Masters in the tall grove at left center.

Late nineteenth or early twentieth-century buggy shed on Squire Davis Masters farm.

Site of Miller's Ferry, which operated on the Sangamon River from the 1820s until 1908, when dredging moved the river to a new channel.

originally jogged close to the Masters house before joining North Petersburg Road. The old road appears in a 1920 county atlas. *Spoon River's* "Jonathan Houghton" provides an eye-witness view of passing the house via this route on occasions separated by forty years. Roots from sycamores planted by Wilbourne caused washouts and the dogleg section was abandoned when Masters Road was straightened.

A short lane from North Petersburg Road leads to the present house. Like the original, it is on a slight rise, commanding long views all around. To the west are fields where the Latimore Creek begins. Within a mile, near Lincoln Trail, was an early home of John and Hannah Armstrong, friends of Lincoln who were celebrated in memorable poetry and prose by Masters. To the north, the Mason County hills rise on the horizon. To the south, there is still a line of woods across the farm long occupied by Sevigna Houghton and his son Henry, but the gracious two-story house was torn down about ten years ago. Henry Houghton was an administrator of Squire Davis Masters' estate. Houghton was the surname Edgar Lee Masters' used for a novel based on Masters lore of several generations. *The Nuptial Flight* (1923). The largest changes in landscape have been to the east, on property owned for more than a century by pioneer settler Reason Shipley and his descendants.

SHIPLEY HILL

Most land directly east of the Masters farm was owned by Henry B. Shipley, a son of Reason, in Edgar Lee Masters' youth. However, the 1874 *Illustrated Atlas Map* shows 40 acres, on which a school was located, owned at that time by Squire Davis Masters. Across North Petersburg Road and beyond a quarter-mile long depression, the land rises to a prominent ridge, called Shipley Hill. Many experiences of the Masters family that are referenced in Edgar Lee Masters' writings are associated with sites on and around this elevation. The land now is owned by Wilhemina Schmidt, widow of Carl Schmidt. A major landscape feature, nearly vanished to the poet's dismay when he last visited, was Shipley Pond in the depressed terrain—really a shallow natural lake. Carl Schmidt told me in 1969 that he installed tile to complete the drainage in the 1940's. The former bankline can be discerned from high ground.

Shipley Hill is crossed by Altig Bridge Road, which goes east directly from the lane to the Masters farm buildings. The road was named for James Altig (1821-88), owner of about 450 acres in the Sangamon bottom, a mile east. Shipley School and Shipley Cemetery, clearly visible from the Masters farmhouse, were on the south side of the road near the ridge summit. Menard County histories locate a school there from the early 1830's—Mentor Graham, teacher of Lincoln, and David Rutledge were among its first teachers. At least six of the eight children of Squire Davis and Lucinda Masters attended Shipley School (the others died in infancy). Another former Shipley student, Edith Masters, told me that two of the daughters, Minerva and Anna, and son Thomas Henry, taught at Shipley. The location on the windswept hill, beside

the burial ground, probably suggested the eerie "Zilpha Marsh" epitaph of *Spoon River Anthology*. A brick successor to early frame school buildings closed in 1949. Remodeled, it now is the Ken Ratliff residence.

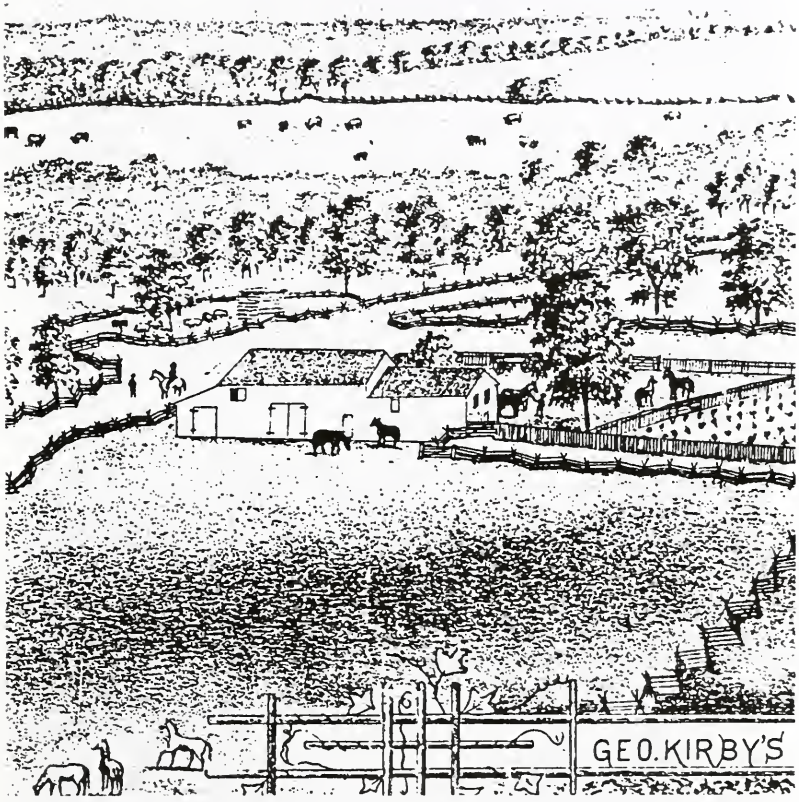
The tiny cemetery on Shipley land was the first burial site of three of the children of Squire Davis and Lucinda Masters. Their remains and those of most of the other occupants were moved to Oakland Cemetery in Petersburg between 1885 and 1905. The Shipley burial ground apparently was not well-kept even in Edgar Lee Masters' boyhood. In *Across Spoon River*, he expressed horror that his Aunt Mary, who died in 1870 at age 28, was buried where "the broken rail fence admitted straying beasts and blacksnakes crawled through the tangled weeds and vines." Some stone fragments, chiefly of Shipleys, remain at the site, overgrown with brush.

Mary's death occurred the day after the sister of the poet, Madeline, was born in the Shipley cabin in a field about three-quarters of a mile to the east. Carl Schmidt said he bulldozed the rock foundations about 30 years ago. Here on rented Shipley land, Hardin and Emma Masters, with their two babies, endured the rigors summarized in the introduction to this study. Although Edgar Lee was too young to remember this period, the influence of family accounts of Hardin's struggles in subsistence farming and uncongenial teaching and of Emma's discontent can be detected in their son's poems about rural hard times.

THE SANGAMON BLUFF ROAD

The easternmost north-south road through Sandridge runs along and sometimes above the low bluffs about one-half mile west of the Sangamon. Now partially abandoned, at one time it was a well-used route to Petersburg. Sites used creatively by Masters are chiefly along the open portion now called Hollis Road, north from Altig Bridge Road to the intersecting Kirby Road. The most influential figure for Edgar Lee Masters from this area was George Kirby, who owned as much as 1,700 bluff and bottom acres. A close friend of Squire Davis Masters, Kirby had lived in what became Menard County since age nine in 1821. Prosperous, profane, and long-lived, his activities are reflected under several names in poems in *Spoon River Anthology* and later Masters' writings. The illustrations of his farm, called Oakwood Place, are among the most impressive in the 1874 *Illustrated Atlas Map*, showing the broad bottom lands, large galleried residence, and burial ground which would be neatly maintained by the family for more than a century. The tiny cemetery figures in the late Masters poem "George Kirby," reproduced with a description of the burial ground in *The Sangamon*.

Masters adopted the name Kirby for a Masters-like family in a series of autobiographical novels. George Kirby's wife was the former Dorcas Atterberry. Masters used the given name in lieu of the real name of his grandmother in several fictional works. The poet thought the deaths within a two-week period in 1904 of Squire Davis Masters and George Kirby was



This lithograph from the 1874 Illustrated Atlas Map *shows the barn on the George Kirby farm, as well as typical countryside of Sandridge Precinct.*

Tombstone of George and Dorcas Atterberry Kirby, in the private Kirby farm burial ground near Hollis (Sangamon Bluff) Road.

A pump on Kirby Road at the site of Kirby School, which closed in 1947. The poet's father taught there 1869-1870.

a poignant signal of the end of the pioneer era.

Proceeding north on Hollis Road past the William Sears farmhouse, the Kirby burial ground can be seen on the west side of the road. A modern house has replaced "Oakwood Place." Modern plats show ownership by a half-dozen individuals of land that once belonged to Kirby. His name survives in the Kirby Road designation. The Kirby School site, called "School No. 4" in the 1874 *Illustrated Atlas Map*, and open until 1947, is at the east edge of a small valley formed by Latimore Creek, about half-way between Hollis and North Petersburg roads. An iron pump at the top of the road bank is the only remaining indication of the school where Hardin Wallace Masters was among the teachers. Only field roads now reach the Sangamon in this vicinity. Sheep Ford, mentioned in *The Sangamon*, was a much-used crossing (supplanted by Altig Bridge) directly east of the Kirby cemetery. Most of the vanished small lakes and sloughs where Edgar Lee Masters fished and camped were on the Kirby or Altig land—Dodson Slough, Spring Lake, and Blue Lake.

As was the case in Masters' youth, German names still appear as landowners on the majority of farms in northern Sandridge. The bluff road continues due north for about a mile, until it turns sharply west as does the Sangamon along the neighboring lowlands. Masters saw this area on recreational excursions, or when the Mussel Shell Ford route was used to Mason City. Several young men and women from the German families did domestic or tenant farming service for Squire Davis and Lucinda Masters. The chief relic of the community that Edgar Lee Masters and others have called "Germantown" or "Dutchtown" is the well-maintained German Methodist Episcopal Cemetery, although the denomination's church nearby was discontinued after a 1911 fire. The cemetery is on the east-west stretch of the bluff road loop, on a hill just west of a Latimore Creek crossing.

The site of Mussel Shell Ford has been well inland since dredging completed the straightening of the Sangamon in 1908. The ford site may be reached by a private road along the lower Latimore to the Edward Boehm farm. Boehm pointed out the ford site to me in 1969 and said he had gradually leveled the old banks. The river now is about one-half to three-quarters of a mile to the north. Another half-mile west, and the bluff road turns south briefly to intersect the main Sandridge route at the Bonnett corner (so called by long association with the bordering property of William Bonnett).

MILLER'S FERRY

The ferry location, usually called Miller's Ford by Masters, had important symbolic use in *Spoon River Anthology* and other Masters writings as a gateway to the larger world. Like Mussel Shell Ford, the site is more than one-half mile south of the artificially-channeled Sangamon. The south bank at the ferry site is still very apparent, as is a slight, extended depression remaining from the old river bed.

The location can be reached as previously described via Lincoln Trail. If

East Oakford Road is used, the turn is at the first northbound public road (the last segment of Lincoln Trail) just west of New Hope Baptist Church (established 1833, present building 1898). A "Lincoln National Memorial Highway" sign is at the intersection. It is a mile to the ford site, on a sandy field road through the James Hawks farm after the public blacktop ends at the Erbie Schoenweis residence. Until very recently, the skeleton of the large farmhouse of long-time ferry operator George Kay Watkins stood just west of the sand road.

The sandy-bottomed crossing actually was fordable on horseback or by wagons only in periods of low water. The ferry was in place there from the late 1820's until discontinuance came with the deep channel dredging of 1905-08. George Miller, hoping to establish a town that would become a county seat, founded the ferry. Most regional mail, stages, and farm product traffic went by this route from and to northern points until the railroad three miles west began to take commerce in the early 1870's. Further decline of the ferry came when a wagon road bridge was completed across the Sangamon near Oakford in 1896.

Lincoln lore gave the Miller's Ferry site some lasting fame. Young Lincoln performed the survey there for a town to be called Huron, and for several roads leading to it. He also purchased a 47-acre tract nearby, leaving a now-dry Sangamon loop with the traditional name "Lincoln Bend." The town failed to develop and (despite the "ruined shacks of Huron" image in *The Sangamon*) few traces probably existed even in Masters' boyhood. The land became part of the 2,000 acres owned by Watkins (1837-1910), who kept the ferry going for a half-century in part because of his holdings in both Menard and Mason counties.

OAKFORD

Views of Oakford, now a village reduced to about 300 residents, can complete the circle around the traditional Sandridge territory. Its era of growth, following founding in 1872 with the railroad, has been noted in earlier sections. Its decline was speeded in the 1930's by completion of Rt. 97, making travel convenient to Petersburg or Havana. Only a few farm and highway service businesses remain in Oakford.

As a youth, Masters passed through it frequently enroute between Lewistown and the Masters farm, when many of the residents were related to the Sandridge families. The largest creative use he made of Oakford was an account, published in 1939 in *Esquire* and condensed in *The Sangamon*, of an overnight visit he made in 1913, accompanied by Theodore Drieser, to John Armstrong. The anecdotes of Armstrong, a skilled fiddler and son of Hannah Armstrong, influenced one of the most well-known *Spoon River Anthology* epitaphs, "Fiddler Jones."

The block-long old business section of Oakford, now mostly vacant, has a 19th century look that Masters probably would recognize. The space

occupied by a famous tavern of the early days, operated by Porky Thomas and described in *The Sangamon*, was a laundromat in recent years. But as would be true throughout the Sandridge region, names on Oakford's cemetery stones would probably foment the most associations from the great reservoir of Masters' memories.

The enduring serenity and security that Sandridge meant to the boy Edgar Lee Masters was perhaps best recaptured by the poet forty years later in *Spoon River Anthology's* "Dillard Sissman." The impressions were received by Masters himself, although the name is modeled on that of a childhood chum, Dillard Shipley (1870-82), who was buried in Shipley Cemetery.

> The buzzards wheel showly
> In wide circles, in a sky
> Faintly hazed as from dust from the road.
> And a wind sweeps through the pasture where I lie
> Beating the grass into long waves.
> My kite is above the wind . . . .
> And the buzzards wheel and wheel,
> Sweeping the zenith with wide circles
> Above my kite. And the hills sleep.
> And a farm house, white as snow,
> Peeps from green trees—far away.
> And I watch my kite . . . .

The Sandridge environment that Masters experienced in youth can be surveyed within as little as forty-five minutes by automobile. It is a journey worth taking, because few rural areas of comparable size have motivated such vivid and sustained poetic expression. To the end of his production, Masters returned in memory to Sandridge for images that were appropriate for what he wanted to convey.

NOTES

[1] I have attempted to give distances to the nearest quarter-mile. Much of the information was gathered by observation, and by interviews with individuals mentioned in the text over a twenty-five year period. Interview sources of particular help were the late Edith Masters, the late storekeeper Eugene Boeker of Oakford and Petersburg attorney Samuel Blane. To avoid cumbersome and repetitive footnoting, most printed sources are indicated in the text. References to Edgar Lee Masters' writings are chiefly to the revised edition of *Spoon River Anthology* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), *Across Spoon River: An Autobiography* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1936), and *The Sangamon: The Rivers of America* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1942). The "late works" where Masters collected many poems reflecting influences of his boyhood are *Invisible Landscapes* (New York: Macmillan, 1935), *Poems of People* (New York: D. Appleton Century, 1936), *More People* (New York: D. Appleton Century, 1939), *Illinois Poems* (Prairie City, IL: Press of James Decker, 1941) and *Along the Illinois* (Prairie City: Decker, 1942). The novel *The Tide of Time* (New York: Farrar, Rinehart & Winston, 1937), draws from the same influences. Maps, plat books, cemetery listings, and county records have been consulted. Menard County is fortunate to have had a number

of excellent writers of local history, producing works about families, places and events for more than 100 years. The most useful for this study include *Illustrated Atlas Map: Menard County, Illinois* (Chicago: Brink, 1874); *The History of Menard and Mason Counties, Illinois* (Chicago: Baskin, 1879); Rev. R. D. Miller, *Past and Present of Menard County, Illinois* (Chicago: Clarke, 1905); Thomas P. Reep, *Lincoln at New Salem* (Petersburg: Old Salem League, 1927; Matilda Johnson Plews, *Some Interesting Menard County Homes* (Petersburg: Observer Press, 1967); Hallie Hamblin, ed., *They Left Their Mark in Oakford* (Oakford, IL: Centennial Committee, 1972); *A Bicentennial Book of Menard County Church History* (Petersburg: Denominational Committee, 1976); *Menard County Illinois History* (Petersburg: Menard County Historical Society, 1988); and *Do You Know Menard County: A Sesquicentennial Commemorative Album* (Petersburg: Sesquicentennial Committee, 1989). These sources generally agree on historical matters about the Sandridge region.

OAKLAND CEMETERY IN PETERSBURG

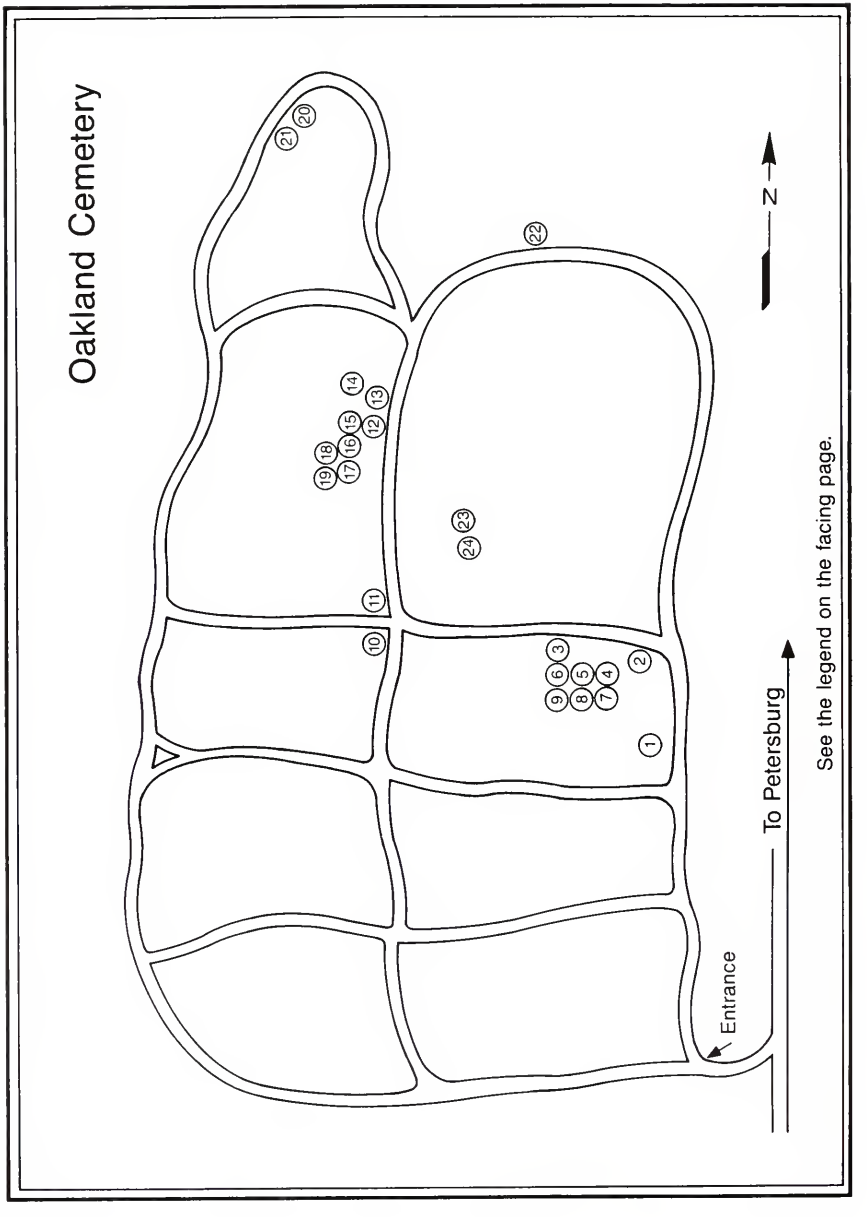
Julie Scott

One of the most beautiful and historic graveyards in Central Illinois is Oakland Cemetery in Petersburg. Lincoln's legendary first love, Ann Rutledge is buried there along with such other famous New Salem residents as Bowling and Nancy Green and Hannah Armstrong. Perhaps, though, its most important claim to fame is that it is the final resting place of Edgar Lee Masters, members of his family, and other notable figures who eventually found their way into Masters' *Spoon River Anthology*.

The cemetery itself, established in 1872, is actually the youngest of the three cemeteries in Petersburg. It was originally founded due to the efforts of three Petersburg citizens who felt the city needed a cemetery that would be easily accessible to the townspeople but not right in town. The older Rosehill Cemetery, on the opposite side of the Sangamon River, sometimes became unreachable when the river overflowed, and burials would have to be delayed. The original City Cemetery, Calvary, had only limited space available. Therefore, in 1872 Henry Schirding, John Brahm, and Thomas Watkins filed a certificate to form a corporation which would thereafter be known as the Petersburg Oakland Cemetery Corporation. They hired a landscape architect from Chicago to design the new cemetery on a lovely site atop one of Petersburg's many hills, a mile or so south and west of the town square. The designer stated that his intention was to make liberal use of evergreens and flowering shrubs and that "Its general characteristic is intended to be known as 'Open Park Scenery' free from shrubbery which would obstruct the view."[1]

When the new cemetery was finally deemed ready to receive its first occupant, the honor went to John F. Parvin, a merchant, on January 6, 1879. Soon many local families were reinterring their loved ones from family plots to the new cemetery. One such family was that of Squire Davis Masters of the Sandridge community north of Petersburg. Squire Davis and his wife Lucinda were the grandparents of Edgar Lee Masters.

Squire Davis purchased a lot in Oakland and had his daughter Mary's body moved there from Sandridge. Edgar Lee Masters wrote about this event in his autobiography *Across Spoon River:* "Long after her death my grandfather bought a lot in Oakland Cemetery near Petersburg and removed the little that remained of her body. . . . At the time that my grandfather bought this lot in the new cemetery my father bought a small lot too. . . . And the beautiful boy who died at five years of age, who was first buried in a very old cemetery of Petersburg, the first one there in fact, was removed to Oakland."[2] This "beautiful boy" was Alexander Dexter Masters, the poet's young brother who


Oakland Cemetery
N
To Petersburg
Entrance
See the legend on the facing page.

Oakland Cemetery

1. Hannah Armstrong
2. Aaron Hatfield
3. Madeline Masters Stone (sister)
4. Hardin Wallace Masters (father)
5. Alexander Masters (brother)
6. Emma Dexter Masters (mother)
7. Thomas Masters (brother)
8. Madeline Masters (infant son of Thomas)
9. Gertrude Masters (wife of Thomas)
10. Ann Rutledge
11. Edward Laning (Lambert Hutchins)
12. Lucinda Young Masters (grandmother); Squire Davis Masters (grandfather)
13. Edgar Lee Masters
14. Mary S. Masters (aunt)
15. Edith Masters (cousin)
16. Norma Masters (wife of Wilburne)
17. Wilburne Masters (uncle)
18. Jean Masters (wife of Hardin)
19. Hardin W. Masters (son)
20. Christina Masters (wife of Dexter)
21. Dexter Masters (nephew)
22. Mitchell "Mitch" Miller
23. Bowling Green (early New Salem resident)
24. Nancy Green (wife of Bowling Green)

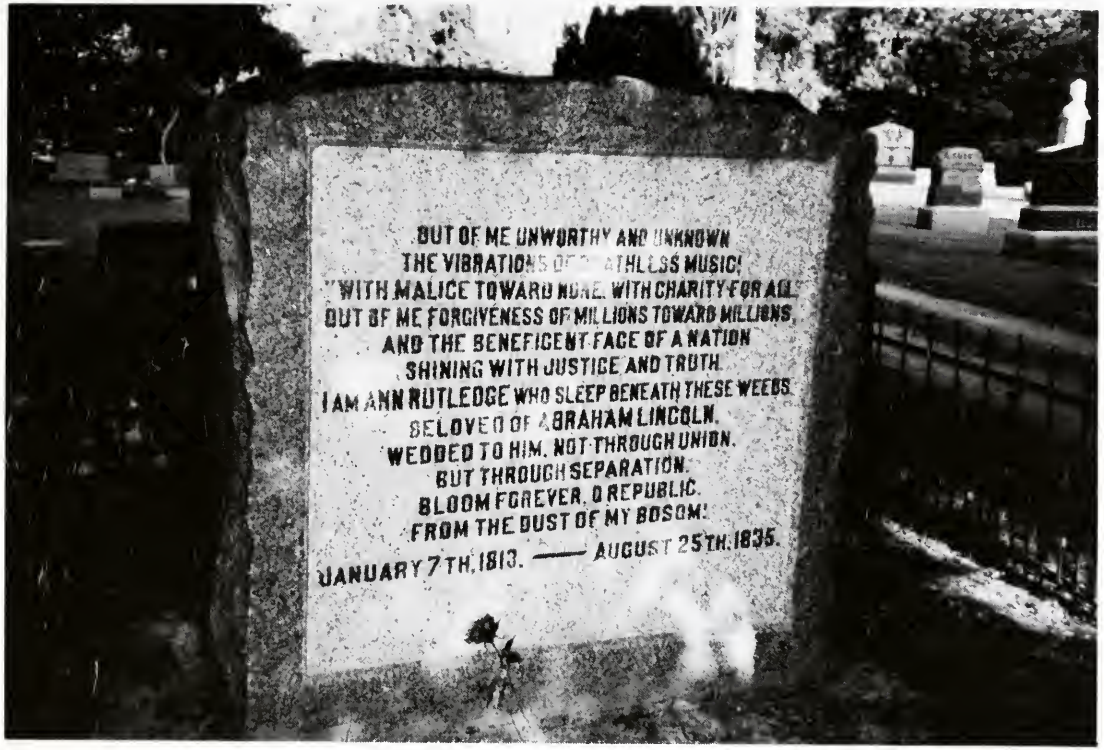
A portion of the road through Oakland Cemetery, showing Masters' headstone at the left.
(All the photographs in this article are courtesy of Julie Scott.)

The headstone of Edgar Lee Masters.

The grave marker for the poet's grandparents, Squire Davis and Lucinda Masters.

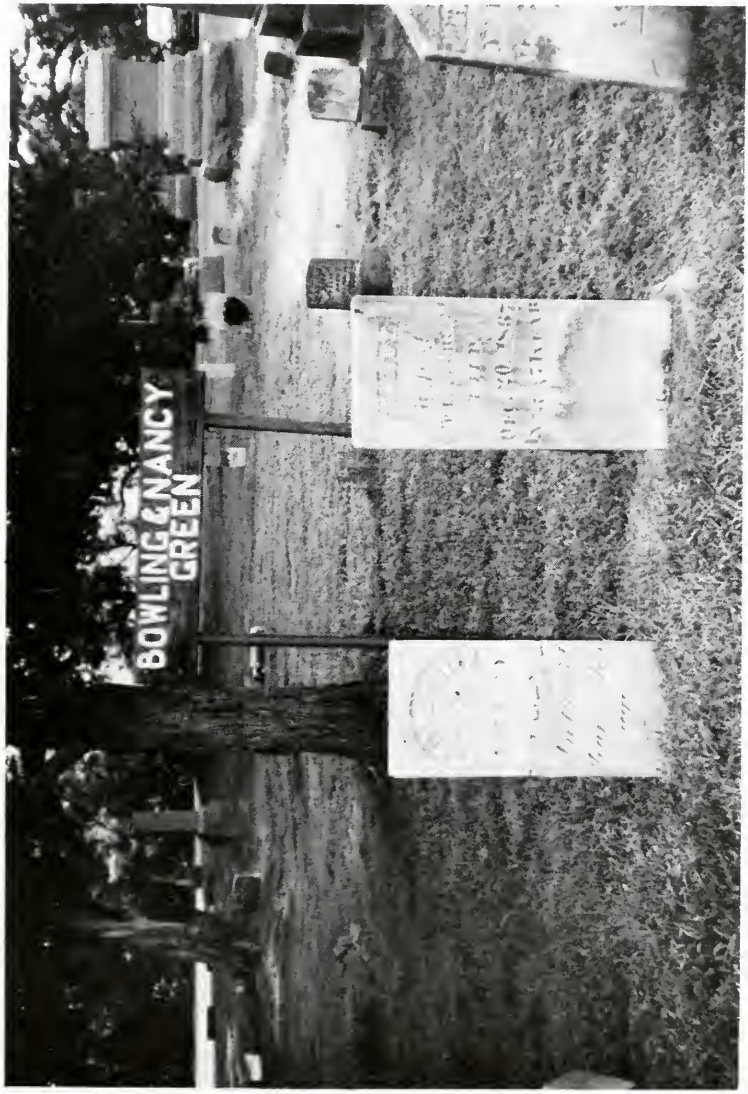
The grave marker for the poet's father, Hardin Wallace Masters. Nearby is a similar marker for the grave of his mother, Emma Dexter Masters. A son, Alexander Masters, is buried between them.

The gravestone of Madeline Masters Stone, the poet's sister.



The gravestone of Ann Rutledge, upon which Masters's poem about her is inscribed.

The grave marker of Hannah Armstrong, who was a friend of Lincoln's at nearby New Salem and who is the subject of a poem in Spoon River Anthology.



The grave markers of Bowling and Nancy Green, who were well-known residents of New Salem.

The grave marker of Aaron Hatfield, who lived near the poet's grandparents and whose name was used for a poem in Spoon River Anthology.

The gravestone of Mitch Miller, the poet's boyhood chum, who became the title character of his novel, Mitch Miller.

The Laning family gravestone, with the headstone of Edward Laning among those in the foreground. A prominent Petersburg resident, Laning was the model for Master's poem "Lambert Hutchins."

The dual grave markers of Dexter Wright Masters, the poet's nephew, who was also a writer.

died of diptheria. (The exact locations of these and other grave sites of interest are indicated on the Oakland Cemetery map elsewhere in this article.)

The death of Alexander affected Edgar Lee greatly, and he later remembered his little brother in *Spoon River* as well as a later poem, "In Memory Of Alexander Dexter Masters." Alexander's grave is in the central part of the cemetery east of the narrow lane that divides it in half. The parents of Edgar Lee Masters, Hardin and Emma, lie on either side of Alexander. The poet's strong-willed father succeeded in forcing his son to become a lawyer and thus delayed his dream of being a full-time writer for many years. He did not succeed, however, in keeping him in Lewistown as his law partner. Emma Masters was a witty, insightful woman whose visits to her son in Chicago influenced the eventual writing of *Spoon River Anthology*. One memorable visit was in May 1914: "About the 20th of May my Mother came to visit us, and we had many long talks. . . . In our talks now we went over the whole past of Lewistown and Petersburg, bringing up characters and events that had passed from my mind."[3]

Madeline Masters Stone, the poet's sister, has also found her resting place in Oakland near her parents. Madeline is briefly alluded to in *Spoon River* as the sister of Daniel in the epitaph entitled "Georgine Sand Miner." In *Across Spoon River* Masters says of her, "With a different nature she might have been a wonderful influence in my life. As it was, she imitated me and used me, but she also departed upon a way wholly foreign to my way; and in so far as she got me into her way she was a disaster."[4]

The poet's youngest brother, Thomas, his wife, and an infant child are directly south of Hardin and Emma Masters. This brother was born in the little house that now sits at the corner of 8th and Jackson Streets in Petersburg. Though the actual time the family lived in the little house was relatively short, the birth of Thomas in 1877 and the death of Alexander in 1878 made that period an important one for the family.

Thirty feet or so west and north of this Masters' family group are the graves of Squire Davis and Lucinda Masters (Davis and Lucinda Matlock in the *Anthology*); Mary Masters, the previously mentioned aunt; Wilburne Masters (Uncle Will), his wife Norma and their daughter Edith; and Hardin W. Masters, the poet's eldest son, and his wife Jean. Edgar Lee Masters lies with this group next to his beloved grandparents.

Masters funeral took place in Petersburg on March 10, 1950. Hilary Masters, the youngest child of Edgar Lee, writes of it in his autobiography *Last Stands*; "The funeral home in Petersburg is an imposing mansion with a high mansard roof that sits on one of the hills overlooking the village square. It had been built by a wealthy man during my father's boyhood, and been the object of his wonder as well as the subject for many of his poems. He had used bits and pieces of it, parts of its builder's history, in a number of *Spoon River* epitaphs and now almost as if to achieve a final possession of the place, he had ordained that his funeral take place in the high-ceilinged ostentatiousness of its Victorian living room."[5]

The epitaph chosen for Masters by his family is from his poem "Tomorrow Is My Birthday." As they appear on this tombstone, the lines read:

> Good friends let's to the fields. . . .
> After a little walk, And by your pardon,
> I think I'll sleep. There is no sweeter thing
> I am a dream out of blessed sleep
> Let's walk and hear the lark.

There is one other Masters family member buried in Oakland, Dexter Masters, also a writer. He was a nephew of the poet and lived most of his life in England. He lies next to his first wife at the northernmost tip of the cemetery.

A few yards south of Masters' grave is that of Ann Rutledge. She was originally buried near the farm at which she died in the Sandridge area. After Lincoln became famous and books began to appear concerning his early days at New Salem and his fondness for Ann, some local people thought she should be moved to Oakland. This was done and a large monument was raised in her honor. Masters was asked if the epitaph from *Spoon River* could be chiseled on her marker. He gave his permission, but the carver did not reproduce it correctly, omitting a word or two, which caused the author great consternation.

Hannah Armstrong, another famous New Salem and *Spoon River* personage, is also buried in Oakland, east of Ann Rutledge. She was extremely fond of Lincoln and he of her. In *The Sangamon* Masters says, "Hannah, though a pioneer woman, had breeding, and according to my grandmother was a woman of excellent character."[6] "Aunt Hannah," as she was always known, died in Iowa in 1890 but her remains were returned to Petersburg and buried at Oakland.

John "Fiddler" Jones, the brother of "Aunt Hannah" who lived in the Clary's Grove area and inspired one of the most famous *Spoon River Anthology* epitaphs, is reputed to be buried in Oakland Cemetery, according to local tradition, but his gravesite is unknown.

Edward Laning, who lies directly north of Ann Rutledge on the other side of a narrow lane, became immortalized in *Spoon River* as "Lambert Hutchins." It was Laning's former home, "The Oaks," in Petersburg that later became the site of Masters' funeral.

"Justice" Bowling Green and his wife Nancy are buried a few yards east of Edgar Lee Masters. Bowling Green did not find his way into the *Anthology*, but he was a well-known resident of New Salem and exerted a strong influence in turning young Abe Lincoln's thoughts to the practice of law.

Aaron Hatfield, another familiar name from *Spoon River*, was well-known to Masters. He had owned a farm near Masters' grandparents and was a member of the Concord Church congregation in Sandridge. As a child, Masters attended many a prayer meeting there. Aaron Hatfield later moved into town and slowly declined into poverty. He lies a few graves east of Masters' parents.

There is one more grave in Oakland of interest to Masters' afficionados, that of his boyhood friend "Mitch" Miller. Mitchell Miller was ten years old when he was killed "jumping" boxcars and became the third person to be buried in Oakland in 1879. Later, Masters made him the title character of his book *Mitch Miller*.

As one roams through the old cemetery the names on the headstones strike a note of recognition in the mind of anyone familiar with the works of Edgar Lee Masters. Names such as Watkins, Kirby, Shipley and many others can be found among the residents of Oakland's quiet hill. The cemetery has fulfilled the expectations of its founders perfectly. It is a short walk from town and can be explored quite thoroughly in an hour or so. The graves of the *Spoon River* and New Salem celebrities sought by the tourists are marked and easy to find. One hundred and twenty years after it was first conceived Oakland Cemetery has become, along with New Salem and the Masters home, one of the area's most visited historic sites.

NOTES

[1] H.W.S. Cleveland, *Act of Incorporation, Rules, Regulations and By-Laws of the Petersburg Oakland Cemetery Association* (Chicago, Jansen, McClurg & Co., 1881), p. 4.

[2] Edgar Lee Masters, *Across Spoon River* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1936), p. 39.

[3] Masters *Across*, pp. 338-339.

[4] Masters *Across*, p. 20.

[5] Hilary T. Masters, *Last Stands* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1982), p. 54.

[6] Edgar Lee Masters, *The Sangamon*, Rivers of America Series (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1942), p. 94.

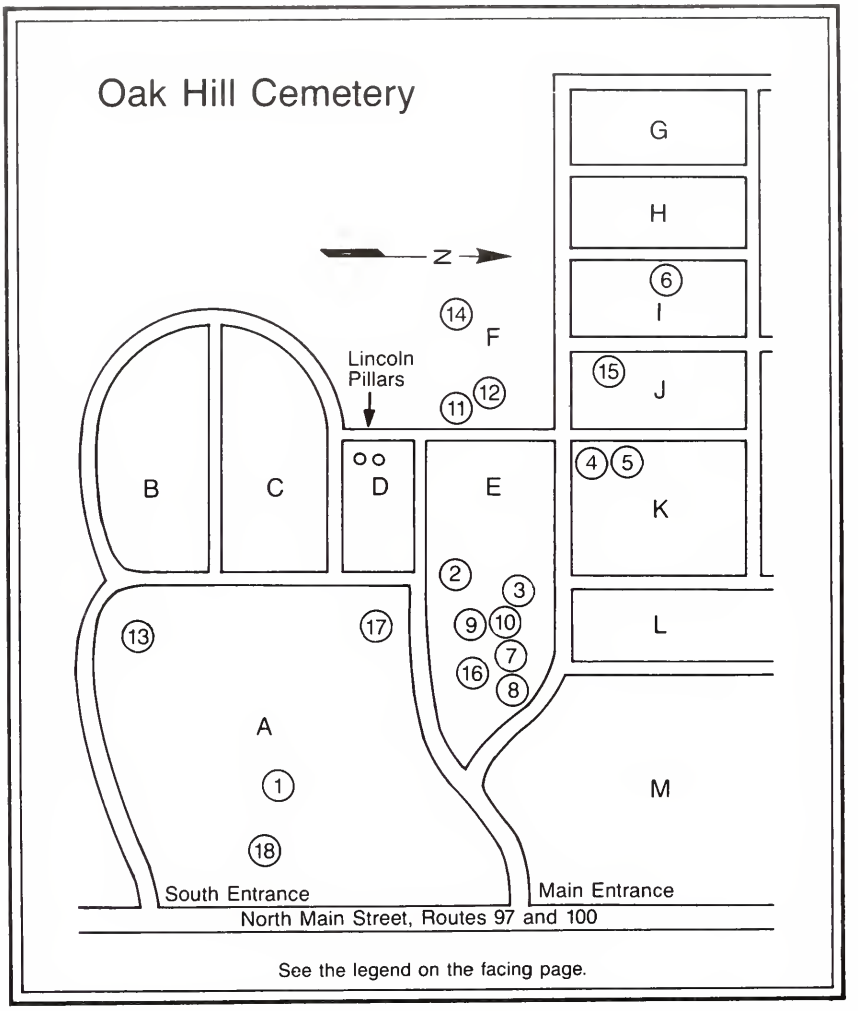
OAK HILL CEMETERY IN LEWISTOWN

Marjorie Rich Bordner

Oak Hill Cemetery, located on North Main Street, Lewistown, is often referred to as "The Hill," a name made famous by Edgar Lee Masters in his opening of *Spoon River Anthology*.[1] The poet refers to that poem in his autobiography, *Across Spoon River*, when he tells of his mother coming from Lewistown to visit him while he was living in Chicago and how he inquired of her about area people that he had known. After his mother talked with him for some time, she left, and he immediately sat down and wrote "The Hill," as well as several other poems for the *Anthology*. The famous opening poem illustrated what his mother had repeatedly told him—that many of the Lewistown people he had once known were deceased. They were "sleeping on the Hill." *Spoon River Anthology* was substantially inspired by the lives of those people. Oak Hill Cemetery is, in fact, the most important historic site in Fulton County, chiefly because it relates so directly to the famous book. However, it is locally important for other reasons as well, and an historical marker has been erected along routes 97 and 100, which form the eastern boundary of the famous burying ground.

The early records of Fulton County show that the first cemetery in Lewistown was located on city lot 16 and that the land for it was donated by Ossian Ross, the founder of Lewistown.[2] Ross came to the area in 1821, to claim his bounty in the Military Tract for having served in the War of 1812. Born in New York State in 1790, he married Mary Winans in 1811, and they travelled to Alton in 1820. One year later the entire Ross family came up the Illinois River in a keelboat and entered the Military Tract at Otter Creek. They traveled up the Spoon River, which would later inspire Edgar Lee Masters and give a sense of identity to that part of western Illinois, and then they traveled over land to where Lewistown is now located. Ross was anxious to establish a permanent settlement, and he brought with him several helpers, including a blacksmith and a surveyor. Stephen Dewey, the young surveyor, laid out the town, and Ross donated parcels of land for such public buildings as a courthouse, and a jail. He also gave land for the first cemetery. The Ross Burying Ground was located on the east side of Main Street, but after a few years, it was abandoned.

Many of the bodies from the Ross Burying Ground were reinterred in the present Oak Hill Cemetery, so in a sense, its history stretches back to the earliest days of the town. The earliest date of a burial in Oak Hill is 1829, but it is not known whether that was a new burial or simply a body being reinterred from the old burying ground. The first person known to be buried



See the legend on the facing page.

Oak Hill Cemetery

Anthology names	Actual names
1. Bill Piersol (in "Hod Putt")	William Phelps
2. Amanda Barker	Lizzie Turner Phelps
3. Judge Sommers	Judge Winters
4. Benjamin Pantier	Kinsey Thomas
5. Mrs. Ben Pantier	Emogene Thomas
6. Hare Drummer	Frank Enrenhart
7. Doc Hill	Doc Hull
8. Flossie Cabanis	Caroline Hull
9. Editor Whedon; Deacon Taylor; Robert Davidson	Wm. T. Davidson
10. Julia Miller; Amelia Garrick; Caroline Branson	Margaret G. Davidson
11. Jack McGuire	Bones Weldy
12. Willie Metcalf	Charlie Metcalf
13. Percy Bysshe Shelley	Wm. C. Bryant
14. Indignation Jones	Jonas Staton
15. Harold Arnett	John Craig
16. Washington McNeely	Lewis W. Ross
17. Harmon Whitney; Cassius Hueffer	Cassius Whitney
18. Nicholas Bindle	Nathan Beadles

The older part of Oak Hill Cemetery, where several Lewistown residents are buried who were models for Spoon River Anthology *poems.*

Some of the older headstones in Oak Hill Cemetery.

The "Lincoln pillars," from the old county courthouse.

The Cassius Whitney gravestone. He was the model for "Harmon Whitney" in Spoon River Anthology.

Local residents in costume now read selected Spoon River Anthology *poems at the graves of residents who were models for the poems. This young woman is by the Caroline Phelps grave.*

at Oak Hill was Maria Ross Colter, the wife of Hugh Colter, who was the first Fulton County teacher, first county clerk, first circuit clerk, and first probate court justice. The date of Mrs. Colter's death is unknown.

The first deed for the cemetery was recorded in 1865. The grantors were Reuben R. McDowell and his wife; the grantee was the Lewistown Cemetery Association. The sum of $100 was paid for the six and a half acres of land. In earlier years the cemetery land was owned by Ossian Ross, Newton Walker, and Mahlon Winans, successively.

The two beautiful pillars in the central part of the cemetery, often called "the Lincoln pillars," originally graced the third Fulton County Courthouse, built in the 1830s. In 1837 the stone for the massive columns was quarried in the Spoon River bottoms, at a contract price of $150 for each column, and the building was finished two years later. On August 17, 1858, Abraham Lincoln delivered an address in front of the courthouse, on a platform erected between those columns. The courthouse was of brick, and it had been preceded by two earlier courthouses, built of logs (1823) and of frame construction (1830).

The 1839 courthouse was destroyed by fire on December 13, 1894, and the pillars were then moved to the cemetery. In an interview some years ago, Judge Hobart S. Boyd vividly recalled watching the courthouse burn. He was yet a young man at the time, and was thinking about pursuing the law as his profession, so the burning of the courthouse made a deep impression on his mind. Because of his interest in the law, he followed closely the events which eventually led to the identification of those responsible for torching the historic building. Masters apparently did the same. He knew the courthouse well because his father's law office faced it, and the poet studied law in that office. In "Silas Dement" in the *Anthology* Masters describes the burning of the courthouse.

Oak Hill Cemetery is the resting place for numerous prominent citizens. Some held important governmental positions at the national or state level. Among them is legislator William S. Jewell, who at one time was Acting Governor of Illinois because both the Governor and Lieutenant Governor were out of state. Resting at Oak Hill also is Major Newton Walker, who had much to do with the building of the courthouse that later burned. He was a friend of Lincoln's, and when the latter was in Lewistown, he stayed in Walker's home, which is located near the cemetery entrance. Ossian Ross and his wife Mary, the founders of Lewistown, who named the town for their son, Lewis, lie there, as do other members of the Ross family. William Phelps and his wife Caroline are also buried at Oak Hill. Phelps was an early trapper and a trader with the Indians, and he later took his wife to Yellow Banks (now Oquawka) and then to Iowa. He is the basis for "Old Bill Piersol," who "grew rich trading with the Indians," according to the first epitaph poem in *Spoon River Anthology*, "Hod Putt." His wife Caroline was the basis for the title character in *The Yellow Rose*, a nineteenth-century romance. Her diary tells much about early days in the Military Tract. Among the more recent burials

is Don Dickson, the founder of Dickson Mounds Museum, which is now an Illinois State facility known worldwide for its excavation of a prehistoric Indian burial mound. There are also numerous veterans of several wars, including the War of 1812 and the Black Hawk War, buried at the cemetery.

Some other burials at Oak Hill are interesting because they are simply unusual. For example, the oldest person buried at Oak Hill Cemetery is Jacob Hardwick, who lived to be 108. Another very old man, Nathaniel Bordwine, lived in three centuries, for he was born in 1799 and died in 1900. One woman, Emma Lee, has the word "colored" inscribed on her headstone, which reveals something about the social history of the community.

Of course, the burials associated with *Spoon River Anthology* continually attract the most attention, and the local Chamber of Commerce has placed markers with numbers on them at certain headstones and has provided a map which identifies the gravesites of some people who inspired *Anthology* poems. That map and the list of names are provided here. Among the figures on that list are William T. Davidson, editor of *The Fulton Democrat* for many years, and Margaret Gilman Davidson, his wife. Davidson was a talented, widely known editor whose writings had an influence on political life in the region. However, Masters disliked him and was inspired by his biased memory of Davidson to write "Editor Whedon," a poem about an unscrupulous newspaperman. Davidson's wife was an early sweetheart of the poet's, and she inspired several *Anthology* poems.

Oak Hill Cemetery is well known in educational circles and has been visited by student groups from several states. Since *Spoon River Anthology* is a popular stage production, student actors often come to Oak Hill to get the feel of the cemetery, search out the resting places of the characters they are portraying, and rehearse right on location. Literature classes also come to study the *Anthology* in relation to its cultural background. Ambitious young journalists often come, along with a photographer, to create a feature story for their publications.

In 1990, on the 75th anniversary of the publication of the famous book, Lewistown began a special event called "Edgar Lee Masters Day," and it has since become an annual event. Included are such activities as parades, poetry reading, and costume judging. The climax of the local event comes when Lewistown people and tourists alike go to Oak Hill Cemetery and hear local folks read poems from the *Anthology*. Each costumed performer stands beside the gravestone of the figure who inspired the poem being read.

After more than 160 years Oak Hill Cemetery has apparently arrived at a point where its historical and cultural significance will be continually appreciated, both by Lewistown residents and by the increasing number of tourists who come to the lovely old burial ground made famous by a book.

NOTES

[1] Brief sections on Oak Hill Cemetery appear in *Historic Fulton County*, compiled by the Fulton County Historical Society (Lewistown: Mid-County Press, 1973), pp. 162-63, and *Fulton County Heritage*, ed. Marjorie R. Bordner (Dallas, TX: Curtis Media Corp., 1988), p. 443.

[2] For additional information on Ossian Ross, see the *History of Fulton County*, ed. Jesse Heylin, bound together with the *Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois* (Chicago: Munsell, 1908), pp. 646-48, and *A History of Fulton County*, ed. Helen Hollandsworth Clark, et al. (Lewistown: Fulton County Board of Supervisors, 1969), p. 194.

EDGAR LEE MASTERS' "FINEST ACHIEVEMENT": *DOMESDAY BOOK*

Herbert Russell

The book that Edgar Lee Masters consistently characterized as his "finest achievement" was neither his world-famous *Spoon River Anthology* (1915) nor its lesser-known sequel, *The New Spoon River* (1924), but a virtually forgotten poetry title called *Domesday Book*.[1] In fact, Masters valued this volume so highly that even when he published "The Genesis of *Spoon River*" (in H.L. Mencken's *American Mercury* for January 1933), he concluded his essay with the assertion that *Domesday Book* was superior to either of the *Spoon Rivers*.[2]

Masters' critical judgment was, of course, wrong. *Spoon River* has been a widely translated international success that has never been out of print, but only a handful of scholars have even looked at *Domesday Book's* 10,000 lines of blank verse, or know its story of Elenor Murray, the Illinois teacher and nurse who does Red Cross work during World War One and then returns home to die.[3] In spite of such limited readership, however, *Domesday Book* ought to be rescued from the obscurity that has engulfed it for more than seventy years, not for its verse, which is largely undistinguished, but for its story, what Masters said about it, and, more importantly, what it says about him.

When *Domesday Book* appeared in 1920, Masters was in the middle of a very difficult time: the notoriety of *Spoon River* had damaged his law practice and he wanted to abandon legal work for literature; he had separated from his wife to pursue the woman he called "Pamela" in his autobiography; his favorite historical era, "courthouse America"—what he often called "old America"—had vanished with the war;[4] and his career as a writer was on the decline.[5]

For several reasons he badly needed another success, but he knew he could not simply publish another *Spoon River*. His editor at Macmillan's, Edward Marsh, had warned him that the critics were "sharpening their pencils" against this, and Masters himself sensed that these would accuse him of having "but one set of strings" if he tried.[6]

But he could not go on as he had either. Between *Spoon River's* appearance in 1915 and *Domesday Book* in 1920, Masters had published four volumes of miscellaneous poems—some of the verses were new, some were visibly dated—but none of these books excited the critics as *Spoon River* had. He had also written in late 1919 a short autobiographical novel, *Mitch Miller*, but it was completed in only thirteen days and was done solely to make money and was secondary to his real interest of poetry.[7] If he were to maintain his position

as the literary lion of the Midwest, he would have to produce another major volume. He hoped to achieve such a work in *Domesday Book*—and it is against this backdrop of personal frustration and post-war unsettledness that *Domesday Book* assumes its significance.

In his attempt to repeat the success of *Spoon River* without actually writing a second book of "epitaphs," Masters returned selectively to several of the ingredients that had worked so well before. He created a large number of characters (over 150), and placed the majority in a small Illinois village in which about thirty of them figured prominently. He gave them unusual names (such as Loveridge Chase, Alma Bell, Consider Freeland) that were evocative of those in *Spoon River*. And he again took death as a starting point: the occasion of *Domesday Book* is a coroner's inquest into the mysterious death of the heroine who one morning in 1919 is found dead "a mile/Above Starved Rock."[8] Masters also repeated the individual voices of the *Anthology*, through the testimony of the numerous witnesses who testify at the inquest—with the result that he also duplicated the objective quality of *Spoon River*, for the coroner is determined to search out the truth:

> Shall not I as a coroner in America.
> Inquiring of a woman's death, make record
> Of lives which have touched hers, what lives she touched;
> And how her death by surest logic touched
> This life or that, was cause of causes, proved
> The event that made events?[9]

The coroner thus utilizes information from more than two dozen individuals—friends, parents, a minister, medical doctor, and governor of the state, as well as others. These provide details on all aspects of the heroine's life and death, from girlhood through post-mortem.

But it is not just the story of Elenor Murray that emerges. Masters says early on that *Domesday Book* is a national assessment:

> I have made a book
> Called Domesday Book, a census spiritual
> Taken of our America.

The book is not, he hastily adds,

> a book of doom, but a book
> of houses; domus, house, so domus book.
> And this book of the death of Elenor Murray
> Is not a book of doom, though showing too
> How fate was woven round her, and the souls
> That touched her soul; but is a house book too
> Of riches, poverty, and weakness, strength
> Of this our country.[10]

To take his census, Masters makes his heroine one whose story must be taken on several different levels. On the two simplest levels, Elenor Murray functions as both a woman and a symbolic "Columbia-figure" who behaves generally as does the country from the 1890s to mid-1919. Her exact age is never stated, but during these years she ceases to be a gay charmer and becomes instead a disillusioned veteran of the war. She travels widely, from her home in central Illinois to New York, California, and the Yukon, and like her country she makes conquests in distant lands and leaves her influence wherever she goes. She establishes numerous liaisons, but she remains single, thereby maintaining her integrity both as a woman and as national symbol.

When World War One comes, she volunteers for Red Cross work and embarks for France. At the same time she encourages her principal lover, one Barrett Bays, an idealistic Chicago professor (and "citizen" reacting to his country's appeal), to join her in the war. Unfortunately, when he gets to France, he grows disillusioned with the changes wrought in both Elenor and the national character:

> For that day I saw
> The war for what it was, and saw myself
> An artificial factor, working there
> Because of Elenor Murray—what a fool!
> I was not really needed, like too many
> Was just pretending, saw myself
> Swept in this mad procession by a woman;
> And through myself I saw the howling mob
> Back in America that shouted hate. . . .[11]

Disgusted, he manages to get out of France and returns to the United States. Here he finally realizes the duality of both Elenor and the nation:

> Who was this woman?
> This Elenor Murray was America;
> Corrupt, deceived, deceiving, self-deceived,
> Half-disciplined, half-lettered, crude and smart. . . ,
> Curious, mediocre, venal, hungry
> For money, place, experience, restless, no
> Repose, restraint.[12]

Consequently, Barrett Bays determines to have nothing more to do with her.

When Elenor returns to America after the armistice, she begs her lover-citizen to forgive her transgressions and to embrace her again. Of course her pleas are to no avail, for Barrett Bays will forgive neither the girl nor the nation she symbolizes, and when he refuses her request, she dies. Her heart stops, as does the figurative heart of that "Old America" she represents. Her death from syncope in the first week of August 1919 coincides with the emergence of the new feminine symbol of freedom for a "new" America, the flapper.

There is more, however, to *Domesday Book* than just this sentimental,

allegorical tale of a vanishing era and a woman who functions as its national symbol. The book may have been Masters' favorite not only because the era in question had an emotional hold on him, but also because of a third, more personal reason.

He left behind numerous clues that suggest he was burying a part of himself with Elenor Murray. The initials, E.M., the euphonic similarity of the names Edgar Lee Masters and Elenor Murray, the number of syllables, and even the stress on individual syllables suggest that Masters intended that at least a portion of Elenor's story be identified as his. The first hint of this comes with the finding of her body. We should remember that in his previous book Masters had identified readily with the Indians who perished on that famous crag in the Illinois River known as "Starved Rock."[13] Now his heroine dies within "the shadow of Starved Rock"[14] (It is, of course, thematically appropriate that the society she represents follows the Indian culture into oblivion.)

Moreover, although Masters had said that his was "a census spiritual" of the nation, it is only partly that, for *Domesday Book* is also a family census. Elenor's parents and Masters' parents are one and the same. Henry Murray, whose "mind was on the law" is modelled after Hardin Masters, who was a lawyer.[15] Mrs. Murray, who knew "fine things, to be a lady," is mismatched with her husband and is based on Mrs. Masters, who was far more refined than was Hardin.[16] Both Mrs. Masters and Mrs. Murray begin their marriages with two sons, and each loses a son when he is five.[17] Finally, it is significant that the story of Elenor Murray appears under the title of "Domesday Book" and that part of Masters' own family history was "preserved in a Doomesday Book."[18]

There are, additionally, some other borrowings that might be pointed out: the member of the coroner's jury identified as "Winthrop Marion, learned and mellow,/ A journalist in Chicago," is clearly modelled after Masters' St. Louis editor-friend William Marion Reedy, who first published the Spoon River poems;[19] the character of David Borrow may be based on Masters' former law partner Clarence Darrow;[20] the maiden name of Elenor Murray's mother (Fouche) is taken from the married name of a childhood sweetheart of Masters;[21] the M.D. who testifies, Dr. Burke, is probably based on Masters' physician-friend, Dr. Alexander Burke;[21] the coroner, Merival, is similar to a poet (Masters himself) questing for the truth; and there will no doubt be other borrowings pointed out when a biography of Masters is at last completed.

After these several parallels and autobiographical borrowings, the intriguing question is how Elenor's favored lover, Barrett Bays, figures in all of this. He is obviously meant to be taken as is Elenor, part person and part abstraction. The key to his significance lies, as does hers, with his name. It is an unusual combination of words directing attention to the head: Barrett, or barrette (a clasp), and Bays, the laurel crown for excellence placed on the head to signify recognition. I think Elenor-Edgar's attempt to keep (or clasp) "Bays" shows Masters seeking what poets have always sought—and have

frequently lost—Fame.

This means that *Domesday Book*, in addition to being a political-social allegory about an era, is also a personal narrative. Masters, ever autobiographical, is talking about his own artistic life during and after The Great War when his hard-won literary eminence had begun to slip from his grasp. As his books after *Spoon River* drew less-flattering reviews, and as the changing tempo of the post-war period shunted aside the "old America" he preferred, he showed himself dying when Professor Barrett Bays (critical acclaim) was denied him.

Did he succeed in this unusual effort? Certainly he succeeded in telling his own story in disguised terms and in describing the end of the era he loved best, the era from which *Spoon River* sprang. He succeeded, too, in answering several of his critics who had complained that his post-*Spoon River* volumes of verse were padded with early and inferior poems; there could be no doubt that this new volume with its World War I theme was of recent composition. And he succeeded also in writing a book that was conceptually interesting, providing a permanent, lengthy model of a national "census spiritual."

He did not, unfortunately, succeed artistically or greatly benefit from *Domesday Book*. The quality of writing did not even come close to rivalling that in *Spoon River*, and the great length of the book turned out to be a liability rather than an asset: the garrulous witnesses who appear before the coroner and his jury offer a convincing census spiritual of crackerbarrel America or possibly the post-war Midwest, but it is doubtful that many readers in 1920 or later felt that the volume caught the essence of existence in urban environments.

There is also a distressing question of originality. When many reviewers read the book, they noted a too-close resemblance to English author Robert Browning's 1868-69 volume, *The Ring and the Book* (this mid-Victorian masterpiece also involves death under suspicious terms and testimonies from many people). In 1912 (or a little before or after), Masters had published a pamphlet on *Browning as a Philosopher* in which he discussed *The Ring and the Book*[23] but when he published his 1936 autobiography, he insisted that Browning's work bore no relation to *Domesday Book*: "I mention this here to say that I wrote that story before I ever read a line of Browning's *Ring and the Book*, and perhaps before I ever heard of it, to which *Domesday Book* has been likened."[24]

As to Masters' assertion that *Domesday Book* was his "finest achievement," there are at least two ready explanations: Masters was a terrible judge of his own work ("he was the worst self-critic I have ever known," said *Poetry* Editor Harriet Monroe), and so he may actually have believed *Domesday Book* exceeded *Spoon River* in some way;[25] a more likely explanation is that he simply wanted to avoid the stigma of being known as a "one-book author."

A measure of his true feelings may be discerned in his treatment of *Domesday Book's* 1929 sequel, *The Fate of the Jury: An Epilogue to Domesday Book*. As the title suggests, this follows the lives (and deaths) of the men on the coroner's

jury. But about halfway through this book—or what should have been the halfway point—Masters suddenly broke off his account in midstory. The sequel to his "finest achievement" did not interest him enough to complete it.

NOTES

[1] See William Kimball Flaccus' "Edgar Lee Masters: A Biographical and Critical Study," Diss. New York University 1952, p. 217, where Masters is quoted by a scholar who knew him, or Hardin W. Masters' *Edgar Lee Masters: A Centenary Memoir-Anthology* (South Brunswick: A.S. Barnes, 1972), p. 9, in which Masters' eldest son remembers his father's good opinion of the book. Portions of this discussion appeared originally in my dissertation, "Edgar Lee Masters' Literary Decline: from *Spoon River* to *The New Spoon River* (1915-1924)," Southern Illinois University at Carbondale 1977, pp. 61-70.

[2] *The American Mercury* citation is on p. 55.

[3] Letter from Sylvia F. Frank, The Macmillan Company, to Herbert Russell, 8 March 1977.

[4] See Masters' *Children of the Market Place* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), p. 465.

[5] For a brief summary of Masters' post-*Spoon River* literary decline, see my "Edgar Lee Masters," *Dictionary of Literary Biography, American Poets, 1880-1945,* Volume 54, Part 1, ed. Peter Quartermain (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1987), pp. 302-03.

[6] Edgar Lee Masters, *Across Spoon River* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1936), pp. 366, 373.

[7] Masters' diary for 1919 shows he drafted *Mitch Miller* between November 27 and December 8. Masters' letter of August 21, 1919, to Edward Marsh of Macmillan's describes his attitude toward *Mitch Miller*. The letter is at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin. The diary is the property of Masters' son Hilary.

[8] *Domesday Book* (New York: Macmillan, 1920), p. 9.

[9] *Domesday Book*, p. 20-21.

[10] *Domesday Book*, p. 3.

[11] *Domesday Book*, p. 349.

[12] *Domesday Book*, p. 354-55.

[13] *Starved Rock* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), pp. 1-4.

[14] *Domesday Book*, p. 9.

[15] *Domesday Book*, p. 41.

[16] *Domesday Book*, p. 39.

[17] *Domesday Book*, p. 42, and *Across Spoon River*, legend to picture facing p. 28.

[18] *Across Spoon River*, p. 10.

[19] *Domesday Book*, p. 21.

[20] John H. and Margaret Wrenn, *Edgar Lee Masters* (Boston: Twayne, 1983), p. 77.

[21] *Domesday Book*, p. 28, and Flaccus, p. 80.

[22] *Across Spoon River*, p. 409.

[23] *Browning as a Philosopher* (Chicago?, 1912?), p. 12.

[24] *Across Spoon River*, p. 369.

[25] Harriet Monroe, *A Poet's Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), p. 378.

MISSED BY MODERNISM: THE LITERARY FRIENDSHIP OF ARTHUR DAVISON FICKE AND EDGAR LEE MASTERS

Marcia Noe

In the spring of 1915, the English critic John Cowper Powys made headlines in the *New York Times* when he stated that the three great American poets writing at that time were Edwin Arlington Robinson, Arthur Davison Ficke, and Edgar Lee Masters (Kramer 275). While few scholars today would agree, his statement is significant because it focuses our attention on some puzzling questions about the latter two poets, whose literary reputations have declined greatly since that time.

During the second decade of the twentieth century, both Ficke and Masters became important figures on the Chicago literary scene when that city, according to H.L. Mencken, was the literary capital of the United States (90). In 1912 Ficke's sonnet "Poetry" was featured in the first issue of Harriet Monroe's groundbreaking new literary journal of the same name. In 1913 the entire February issue of *Poetry* was given over to the poems of Ficke and those of his Harvard mate Wittmer Bynner. Five years later, Ficke and Bynner gained national attention when they were revealed to be the perpetrators of the *Spectra* hoax, a parody of Imagist poetry that many respected American critics took seriously and praised effusively.

Masters, too, was making his mark in the literary world. After his Spoon River poems were published in Reedy's *Mirror,* Masters was hailed as the heir to Walt Whitman by Powys and praised by no less a luminary than Ezra Pound. His poems then began to appear in literary journals such as *Poetry, Rogue,* and *Others.* In 1916 *Poetry* awarded him the Helen Haire Levinson Prize.

During the heyday of the Chicago Renaissance both poets seemed destined for exciting literary careers. However, today Masters is known primarily for his *Spoon River Anthology,* and few scholars unacquainted with midwestern literature know Ficke's work. Why were Ficke and Masters missed by modernism? Why did they shine so bright, then fall so far? What were the personal circumstances and cultural forces that brought about their eclipse? Some answers to these questions can be found by examining their thirty-year literary friendship.

Probably Ficke and Masters first met in Chicago in 1915 at a luncheon given for Amy Lowell by Mary Aldis, a poet and patron of the arts. In those heady days when the poets of the Chicago Renaissance stood at the forefront of that city's cultural scene, Ficke and Masters met infrequently in the *Poetry*

Arthur Davison Ficke
(Photo courtesy of Marcia Noe.)

magazine office, at dinners for visiting poets, at amateur theatricals as well as at productions of Maurice Browne's Little Theater, and at lunches with writers such as Carl Sandburg, Floyd Dell, Theodore Dreiser and Vachel Lindsay ("Other Notes" 6).

Thrown together at such gatherings, Ficke and Masters would seem to have had little in common. Ficke had enjoyed every advantage a promising young poet could desire. Harvard-educated, well-traveled, and widely read, he came from a wealthy and socially prominent Davenport family. Masters, a Knox College dropout, came from a lower middle-class family that had moved several times throughout the Midwest in search of a better life. Now middle-aged, abrasive, and cynical, he had almost despaired of succeeding as a literary man while struggling to support his family on a labor lawyer's salary.

However, Masters and Ficke did share several formative experiences. Both were raised in small midwestern towns; both longed to escape from the pressure to conform and the limited opportunities that these towns offered. Both were detained in their hometowns by strong fathers, attorneys who also served as mayors of Davenport, Iowa, and Lewistown, Illinois. Both poets were persuaded to read law and join their fathers in legal partnerships, but their fathers' efforts to discourage them from pursuing literary interests failed; both Ficke and Masters continued to read widely and write poetry while they practiced small-town law. Eventually the lure of literary renown drew them to Chicago; for a time it seemed that they would achieve it there.

After their initial success in Chicago, both men moved East but did not meet often during the twenties. After serving in World War I, Ficke, who would be an invalid all his life, battled tuberculosis in Saranac, Southern Pines, Santa Fe, Asheville, and Kerrville. In 1925 he bought a farm, Hardhack, near Hillsdale, New York, and began to spend summers at Hardhack and winters in New York City and, occasionally, in southern climes.

Masters visited Ficke in Santa Fe in the twenties and spent several summers during the thirties in upstate New York near the Fickes' farm before settling into the Hotel Chelsea in Manhattan. During the thirties and forties the two poets corresponded frequently. A review of this correspondence reveals much about their personalities and suggests why the work of neither poet is widely known today.[1]

One of the great pleasures of Ficke's life was friendship. He carried on a lively and wide-ranging correspondence with writers such as Masters, Floyd Dell, Marjorie Allen Seiffert, Witter Bynner, Carl Van Vechten, Theodore Dreiser, Mary Aldis, Edna St. Vincent Millary, and Robinson Jeffers. To these as well as to less illustrious friends he offered advice, news, encouragement, gossip, political and literary opinions and, occasionally, money whenever he learned that one of his correspondents was in need.

Masters, by contrast, was more isolated, although he did enjoy writing humorous letters in the personae of Spoon River-type characters such as Lute Puckett and Lucius Atherton, whose names he had printed on letterhead stationery. In these missives he offered such opinions as, "Women can neither

review nor write poetry. By which I mean that with ovaries and fallopian tubes they stand at a place in life where poetry is not created" (6 October 1936). In response to Ficke's plea that he allow William Rose Benet to publish some of Masters' poems in *The Oxford Book of American Literature* he stated:

> But Thomas Bailey Aldrich was on the list and I believe that typewriter poettaster Eugene Field. And such homonculi as Allen Tate, Crane, Lola Ridge, children *per anum* of that quack T.S. Eliot were on the list. . . . Mr. Benet referred to above is a futile piddler, and not fit to assemble an anthology, especially is he not fit to be a critic of poetry. To be such requires a judge-mind and a good set of testicles. (14 October 1937)

A few weeks earlier he had lamented that "there is not enough good will and association among the writers of today. Looking into other days—those of Emerson, etc.—we see much letter writing and association. I fear we of this generation are not so genial and friendly as those of other days"(26).

The frustration Ficke sometimes experienced in pursuing a friendship with an often contrary and irascible writer can be seen in a dialogue between the two men that Ficke recreated in his journal:

> 'Doing any writing nowadays, Art?'
> 'Not much, Lee. I'm doing a little studying, reading.'
> 'What you reading?'
> 'Some of John Dewey. He writes very badly, and it is hard work to read him; but he is trying to say something, and often I get something I value.'
> 'Dewey? Oh, he's no good. You hadn't ought to waste your time reading him.'
> 'What's the matter with him?'
> 'Oh, he's just a horse's ass. He's no good.'
> 'Do you really think so, Lee? What things of his have you read lately?'
> 'I ain't read nothing of his, ever. I have too great a contempt for his work to read it.' (24 August 1939)

Despite their disagreements, the two writers exchanged frequent letters during the late thirties and early forties. Much of the time they commented on each other's work. "The spare, terse, prosaic tenor of your lines carried me on, until at the last, or by the middle the poetry of the substance and the story unfolded out of the unadorned surface of the lines and became music," wrote Masters about Ficke's *The Road to the Mountain* (15 July 1930). Masters also admired Ficke's *Mrs. Morton of Mexico* and *An April Elegy*. In 1936, when he wrote to praise Ficke's *The Secret and Other Poems*, he gave Ficke's publisher permission to use his comments in the publicity for that volume.

Ficke, who at one point during the thirties was receiving new poems from Masters almost every day, praised his friend's "Catallus," "Lands End," "Cebes to Phaedrus," "Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and the King Cobra," and the books *Invisible Landscapes* and *The New World*. But he was often faced with the ticklish task of commenting on work that revealed its author's powers to be deteriorating. Through humor and candor, he usually succeeded in offering helpful yet inoffensive criticism.

> Your "Hymn to the Unknown God" is, of course, as you well know, close to my heart. It says what I believe—as I, in reverse fashion, tried to say it in the poem "Father," which you liked.
> But by the Eternal and Unnameable God, Lee, I swear that you have overwritten this, and I beg you with my whole heart to consider one suggestion I want to make—
> ***Let the reader do the work!***

Ficke then edited a line from the poem to render it less of a statement and more of a suggestion. He concluded in a postscript: "If somebody could take you by the hair where it is short and persuade you to cut, in places, you would have a *grand* piece!" He added, "Don't misunderstand my desire to ask you to make it the greatest poem ever written" (9 August 1937).

Although evaluating each other's work played a major role in their relationship, the two men also showed a more personal concern for each other. In the thirties, when Ficke learned his old friend was nearly penniless and suffering from malnutrition, he organized a fund drive for Masters and continued to send him small sums during the forties. Likewise, after learning of Ficke's battles with depression and alcoholism, Masters wrote to offer advice:

> I don't believe you need a medical doctor at all. If I were in your place, speaking of what I'd do, sick or well, I'd go up to Hardhack and make that soil yield thoughts and stories. I'd watch the clouds over the hills, I'd read over what I've read, I'd read what I never had read. I'd have company sometimes, when it was good company. I'd bend myself to the task of writing myself out, and writing about the people until they were written out. If you can do that or do anything comparable to it you will be a well man and a sound. (19 January 1939)

In their letters Ficke and Masters often discussed their fellow writers. Masters had few good words for any of his contemporaries. Of Edna St. Vincent Millay he wrote. "Millay lacks tenderness, passion, except for her own passion. Her nervous desire to mount, her vanity interfere with a genuine lyricism. The truth is that women can write about nothing except f-----g. There are exceptions" (24 October 1937).

Ficke, too, was less than impressed by many of the leading modernist poets, although he did admire Elinor Wylie and Robinson Jeffers. "I have read the whole of Eliot's poetry—and I regard it as incomprehensible and affected rot," he wrote to Masters in 1936 (2 October). *When A Masque of Reason* was published he commented, "And if you will read a review or two about Robert Frost's latest masterpiece, which takes up the same subject which even Job and God dropped in disgust, you will see that OUR GREATEST LIVING POET is even a bit less intelligent than Job and God were" (26 March 1945). Especially revealing is the following excerpt from one of his letters to Masters:

I am very glad you liked my "America is Happy Tonight." I wrote to George Dillon that I thought it a public disgrace that he should print such rot as anything written by

e
e
c
u
m
m
i
n
g
s

(The way I have typed this expresses my feelings: It is meant to represent the drippings of weak liquid shit from a GOOSE.) (10 January 1939)

Perhaps the strongest bond between Masters and Ficke was forged by their antipathy to the new poetry and their alienation from the leading American poets of the day. Both had been schooled in a classical poetics which privileged poetic diction, exalted subject matter, traditional schemes of rhyme and meter, archaic language, and devices such as personification and apostrophe. After laboring to learn their craft, they became annoyed when they discovered that its rules had been changed just as they were beginning to achieve some literary recognition. While they were still writing odes to the seasons and sonnets to beautiful women, other poets had begun writing about red wheelbarrows and blue guitars—and those were the poets who were getting most of the attention! A hint of this resentment can be seen in Ficke's retrospective explanation for the *Spectra* hoax. "We who devoted our whole lives to poetry were angry and indignant on seeing apes and mountebanks prancing in the Temple. We had learned quite well that poetry is not as easy as that" (qt. in Smith 46).

Ficke's use of the word "temple" in the passage above suggests a second reason why he and Masters failed to embrace the experimentalism of modern poetry and thus faded from the literary horizon. From boyhood they had revered Poetry, the one certain means of escape from the tawdry materialism of Lewistown and Davenport and the most satisfying form of rebellion against their fathers' philistinism. To them the lofty tones of Shelley and Goethe, the classic form of a sonnet or an ode represented the beauty and order that midwestern small town life lacked. The language of the new poetry, with its emphasis on everyday objects and realistic speech, represented everything Ficke and Masters despised about the towns where they were raised. One of Ficke's *Spectra* poems ends with the couplet.

> Asparagus is feathery and tall,
> And the hose lies rotting by the garden wall. (qt. in Smith 84)

The humorous tone that Ficke achieves by juxtaposing the asparagus and the rotten hose conveys his disdain for the Imaginists' principle of combining the

sublime and the mundane.

In 1916, with the *Spectra* hoax in full flower, Ficke published an essay, "Modern Tendencies in Poetry," which further reveals why he and Masters were out of step with contemporary trends:

> The extremists of the new school look with distrust on the established verse forms. They feel that the constraint of any metrical system is an intolerable prison to the spirit of the poet. . . . For ironic comments on the human comedy around us, for pictures of the common stage on which we do our little struttings, free verse is admirable; but it will seldom serve to transport us to the heights of religious experience, or to the depth of the black night of the soul, or to the sun-swept levels of beauty-drunk happiness. (441)

Throughout this essay, as exemplified by the passage above, the one thing that Ficke emphasizes most strongly about the new poets is their quest for freedom from the constraints of traditional poetry. This emphasis reveals the Romantic perspective from which Ficke as well as Masters viewed poetry and demonstrates how philosophically out of tune with modernism they were. Theirs was a pre-modern sensibility that privileged the poet rather than the text. In contrast to the modernists' goals—detachment, objectivity, the immediate presentation of sense experience—Masters and Ficke saw poetry primarily as a means of rebellion and self-expression. Their hero was Prometheus rather than Prufrock. For them the key elements in the new poetry were the poet's quest for self-knowledge and his need to free himself from any convention that would stifle his creativity. Ficke himself illuminates this aspect of Masters' sensibility as he records a conversation he had with Masters about the 1939 World's Fair, which Masters despised. After Ficke commented that he had attended the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition as a child and thought it very beautiful, Masters replied that to him it was the most beautiful thing that ever existed. Ficke goes on to comment:

> I believe that this little episode tells one of the most important secrets of Masters' personality. He loved the Chicago World's Fair because it was a reminiscent glorification of classic architectural styles; he hated the New York World's Fair because it was an experimental venture into the possible architecture of the future.
>
> Masters was to the very core a hater of change and a lover of what was gilded by the mists of ancient sunsets. He had a schoolboy's romantic faith in the splendor and nobility of the past. It may seem strange to call the author of "Spoon River" a sentimental romanticist; but such I know him to be. ("Notes on Edgar Lee Masters" 1)

Ficke closes his essay on modern tendencies in poetry with these words:

> In future years it will doubtless not be possible for the dispassionate critic to take the new poetry quite as seriously as, today, it takes itself. Such an observer may grow a little bewildered and even amused as he surveys our Schools and Movements—the Imagists and Vorticists, and Spectricists and Patagonians and a Choric School and Heaven only knows how many others. He will perhaps wonder wherein the revolutionary elements of all these Revolutions lay, for he will see clearly that all the elements of our new poetry are in fact very old elements. (445)

Ficke's attempt to reduce the modernists' brilliant innovations in language to the crazed outpourings of a few faddish schools of poetry suggests that he never really understood that the main contribution of the modernists was their radically different use of language to express a new sense of disintegration, fragmentation, and disenchantment with Victorian values, to attempt to unify thought and feeling and to problematicize the difference between subject and object. Ironically, though, Ficke's and Masters' best-known works, the *Spectra* poems and the *Spoon River Anthology*, are written in free verse. Perhaps the secret of these works' success is that in these poems both writers speak through personae. While writing as Anne Knish rather than as a Promising Young Poet, Ficke could feel free to experiment; consequently, he created a new, fresh sound. While writing as one of his Spoon River characters, Masters could liberate himself from the stilted tone and archaic diction he used when writing Poetry. Ficke seemed to realize this when he commented to Witter Bynner, "Some of my best work is in *Spectra*" (qt. in Smith 43).

A final explanation for Masters' and Ficke's decline can also be found in Ficke's essay on modern tendencies in poetry when he discusses the Imagists (H.D., Pound, and Amy Lowell), comparing them to Keats and Burns and emphasizing Imagist traits in the work of all five poets. Ficke clearly believes that all good poetry shares the same traits, irrespective of the age in which it is written. This belief underlines Ficke's philosophical orientation: he was essentially an idealist who believed in absolutes and eternal verities at a time when his contemporaries were questioning these notions. "Truth, interpretive significance and emotional power are the only criteria by which any work of art can be judged. By truth I mean something that conforms to the normal experience of mankind" ("Other Notes" 8).

Masters, too, shared this idealistic orientation, as can be seen when he discusses true poetry in his autobiography, *Across Spoon River*. "There is the poetry of fancy and of the imagination, and the poetry that lulls and lifts, and soothes with music and pictures. But the greatest poetry is that which founds itself upon the truth which is the beautiful, and the beautiful which is the truth" (413).

In his insightful and well-informed study of the influences on Masters' poetry, *Beyond Spoon River*, Ronald Primeau points out that Masters sought inspiration for his poetry in the classics; while he strove to be original, he also grounded his work firmly in the classical tradition, which viewed poetry as an expression of mystical vision and communal values rather than as an original voice expressed through startlingly new forms (14).

An additional influence reinforcing his idealistic orientation was the work of Goethe, as Masters indicates in *Across Spoon River* when writing of his response to *Faust*: "Goethe declares here that in the transitory life of earth love is only a symbol of its diviner being, and that the possibilities of love, which earth can never fulfill, become realties in a higher life which follows, and that the spirit which woman interprets to us here still draws us upwards" (408).

But it is in his vision of the land that Masters' idealism comes through most clearly. Here Emerson and Whitman were the chief influences, as Masters came to view the Illinois prairie as a reflection of spiritual truths and human emotions. Primeau traces the forms that Masters' idealism took in the work that he produced over the last ten years of his career:

> First there are anguished struggles to possess the pure energy of the life forces. Then these Promethean quests break out into the realm of science fiction, into new universes and unexplored realities. But what goes up must come down, and soon the despair of the wide-eyed dreamer sets in. The disillusion is conquered only by the eternal truths found in serene pastoral settings. Content with a vision of eternity in the invisible and internal landscape, the poet pours forth hymns of celebration on the silent prairie (179).

Aesthetically, emotionally, and philosophically out of tune with the modern era, Masters and Ficke, not surprisingly, continued to write many poems that seemed to belong more to the nineteenth century than to the twentieth. As time went on, their early promise faded and other poets began to dominate the American literary scene: Frost, Eliot, cummings, Williams, Stevens. Today Edgar Lee Masters and Arthur Davison Ficke are remembered more for their roles in American literary history than for the power and vision of their work.

NOTE

[1] All quotations from the Masters-Ficke correspondence and from Ficke's journals will be cited parenthetically in the text by date. I have reproduced the original spelling, punctuation and capitalization. These documents are held by the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

WORKS CITED

Ficke, Arthur Davison. "Notes on Edgar Lee Masters, 1938-9." May 1, 1939. Typescript Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

_____. "Other Notes." Typescript. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

_____. "Modern Tendencies in Poetry." *North American Review* 204 (September 1916): 438-47.

Kramer, Dale. *Chicago Renaissance: The Literary Life of the Midwest*. New York: Appleton-Century, 1966.

Masters, Edgar Lee. *Across Spoon River: An Autobiography*. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1936.

Mencken, H.L. "The Literary Capital of the United States." *Nation* (April 17, 1920): 90,92.

Primeau, Ronald. *Beyond Spoon River: The Legacy of Edgar Lee Masters*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

Smith, William Jay. *The Spectra Hoax*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1961.

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

THE GREAT PRAIRIE FACT AND LITERARY IMAGINATION. By Robert Thacker. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989. Pp. 301 $32.50.

Conventionally, the titles of scholarly studies are divided by a colon into a main title and a subtitle. We would then have *The Great Prairie: Fact and Literary Imagination*. Instead, the design of this book's title rather emphatically places *The Great Prairie Fact* together and on a line prominently above *and Literary Imagination*. I would like to think that that design follows Robert Thacker's instructions, for he has written a book which argues the primacy of the prairie itself. Thacker's purpose is to demonstrate the veracity of Willa Cather's statement that "the great fact was the land itself." His method is "first to define and then to trace the processes—recorded in literary texts—by which Europeans and their descendants came to understand the imaginative demands of prairie space and to incorporate them into esthetic conventions." Some of this ground has been covered before by historians and literary critics, most notably by Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1950), but Thacker's study is very welcome today because it gives us the benefit of the last forty years of scholarship.

Though we may characteristically think of the prairie as typified by the high plains west of the Missouri River, the area extends eastward to the Ohio River and is simply defined as unforested and generally level land. It may or may not be arid. And for Thacker the prairie extends northward into the Canadian provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. That enlarged perspective provides for a refreshing treatment of Canadian writers who have not been a part of earlier, exclusively "American" studies. From a literary standpoint, the two essentials of the prairie are its level, clear view to the horizon and its treelessness. These are the features that were completely novel to the European experience of landscape.

Thacker's study of how writers adapted esthetically to the prairie landscape is not only admirably comprehensive but also penetrating and thorough on selected writers and works. He begins with a survey of firsthand accounts of the prairie from the records of explorers and travelers dating from the sixteenth through the nineteenth century. These nonliterary documents record the base line for the future assimilation of the prairie into literary frameworks. The next stage of reactions to the prairie is characterized by the romantic travel narratives of Washington Irving and Francis Parkman and their artist bretheren: George Catlin, Paul Kane, Karl Bodmer, and Alfred Jacob Miller. To this end the text is graced by twenty-one illustrations of these artists' works.

Then follows discussion of the nineteenth-century fiction which

demonstrates the appropriation of the prairie into the literary landscape. These novels move from the early romance of Cooper's *The Prairie* to the later realism of Hamlin Garland and his Canadian counterpart Arthur Stringer. Pioneering represents the culimination of the prairie experience in the early twentieth century, and it is examined in the novels of Cather, Rolvaag, Stegner, and the Canadian Frederick Philip Grove. Thacker concludes with a consideration of those novelists who write of the postpioneering prairie such as Steinbeck, Wright Morris, and the Canadian Robert Koretsch.

The Great Prairie Fact and Literary Imagination covers an immense physical and esthetic landscape, but it does so cogently and coherently. Through a careful selection of representative authors it avoids superficiality; however, the numerous resources which it draws upon and which are listed in a useful twenty-page bibliography attest to its scholarly thoroughness. Supporting material which might otherwise clutter Thacker's own highly readable narrative is included in the forty-four pages of endnotes. This substantial study is a first-rate analysis of how our "foreign" view of our new territory was transformed into a more indigenous "native" perception by the very conditions of the prairie itself.

Jay R. Balderson
Western Illinois University

PAPER COUNTIES: THE ILLINOIS EXPERIENCE, 1825-1867. By Michael D. Sublett. New York: Peter Lang, 1990. Pp. 254. $51.95.

This is a book about failure. In it Michael Sublett presents a multitude of details associated with the failure of seventeen "paper counties" to become actual political entities in Illinois. The volume is divided into eight chapters, most of which are arranged in a chronological order. There follows an appendix containing the legal description of each paper county's boundaries, a generous list of chapter notes, an extensive bibliography, and a helpful index. The text is supplemented by a number of maps, most for the purpose of identifying the location and regional setting of individual paper counties.

Sublett reports that promoters and legislators introduced petitions and bills in the General Assembly for some two to three hundred counties in hopes of securing enabling legislation. The seventeen under scrutiny of his study are ones "that came close to achieving countyhood but somehow failed to take the final step." They include four with proposed names—Putnam, Kankakee, Douglas, and Gallatin—identical to those of other entities that were successful in attaining county status. Although the paper counties were proposed between 1825 and 1867, thirteen of the seventeen were presented for approval during the 1840s and 1850s. This temporal concentration was approximately matched by a geographical one; fourteen of the counties were proposed between 1825 and 1867, thirteen of the seventeen were presented

for approval during the 1840s and 1850s. This temporal concentration was approximately matched by a geographical one; fourteen of the counties were to have been in the central one-third of the state. Only one was proposed for the southern one-third where county formation was relatively early. Sixteen would have been comparable to the state's present counties in their territorial size. The exception, Putnam County, was the earliest one proposed; with an area of 10,945 square miles, it would have encompassed most of the northern one-quarter of the state.

A common motive for the attempted organization of a new county was poor accessibility (in terms of distance, a physical barrier, or both) to the existing county seat. An example was the relatively isolated Waverly area, southwest of Springfield, where persistent efforts to organize a new county only resulted in three failures: Allen County in 1841, Benton County in 1843, and Oregon County in 1851. Similarly, distance from eastern Adams County to the county seat, Quincy, was the rationale for two unsuccessful (and controversial) attempts to organize the area into a new county: Marquette County in 1843 and Highland County in 1847. For residents near the upper Spoon River, both distance and the barrier of the Illinois River isolated them from the Putnam County seat of Hennepin and led to frustrated efforts to form a new county named Coffee.

Sublett concludes, however, that economic motives were most important in the organizational efforts for nearly all of the paper counties. Geographical situations, political ambitions, and societal issues all were pertinent, "but the bottom line for most new-county sympathizers . . . was money." More jobs (including those of county office-holders), the sale of town lots, and increased land values, especially in the new county seat, were the main economic benefits anticipated. Curiosity about the possibility of economic rewards for legislators who supported the new counties led Sublett to search the records in several courthouses for evidence. Surprisingly, he found no indication of land speculation in the proposed counties by senators and representatives—at least in their own name. Of course, bribes or other payments to legislators in exchange for their support would not appear in public records.

A variety of factors contributed to the failure of the proposed paper counties, but lack of support in referenda terminated a majority of the schemes. The General Assembly did not require that each new county proposal be decided by voters in the affected area. Where it did, however, the proposal typically went down to defeat. The creation of a new county out of the area of one or more existing counties and the designation of a new county seat raised troubling questions. To what extent would the loss of territory reduce the parent county's tax base? How would existing county debt be handled? What would be the impact on the existing county seat(s)? Such concerns apparently were enough to dissuade most voters.

Probably this book will attract fewer readers than it deserves. Rich in detail, it provides a great deal of insight into the territorial organization and political processes in Illinois during much of the nineteenth century. The text is not

lively reading, but the thoroughness of Sublett's research and the details he has uncovered are most impressive.

Ronald E. Nelson
Western Illinois University

A GUIDE TO THE HISTORY OF ILLINOIS. Edited by John Hoffmann, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1991. Pp. 349. $59.95.

Illinois historical studies have appeared in ever-increasing numbers during recent decades, so an up-to-date bibliographical guide has been sorely needed. That need has been met with John Hoffman's new volume, *A Guide to the History of Illinois*.

Part One is devoted to fourteen bibliographical essays by well-known Illinois historians, as well as an introduction by Hoffmann. Of course the essays do not attempt to be exhaustive, but they are carefully researched, well-written studies that orient the reader to eight historical periods and six important topics. The latter include "People of Illinois," "Chicago," "Religion and Education," "Literature," "Art, Architecture, and Music," and "Abraham Lincoln: The Illinois Years." As this list suggests, Hoffmann is to be commended for the broad focus of his book: it gives attention to some fields—such as literature and music—which are too often overlooked. The authors in Part One not only mention important works but attempt to assess the state of scholarship in their fields. Mark Plummer and James Hurt do an especially fine job of referring to facets of Illinois history that deserve attention. Hoffmann's introductory essay is excellent and should be required reading for anyone interested in Illinois studies.

Part Two of the book includes a dozen reports on archival and manuscript collections related to Illinois, along with a short introductory essay by Hoffmann. The major Illinois repositories are covered, as well as the Library of Congress and National Archives. The archivist-authors generally do a fine job of packing their reports with information about collections and keeping them well-organized and readable at the same time. Addresses and phone numbers for the repositories are included, making it easy for readers to seek additional information.

A Guide to the History of Illinois is indispensable for scholars and others with an interest in the state's history. It includes an index of topics and authors, which makes the book very convenient to use.

Editor John Hoffmann is librarian of the Illinois Historical Survey, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He deserves the thanks of everyone connected with the field of Illinois history for providing our state with a first-rate bibliographic guide.

John E. Hallwas
Western Illinois University

THE ENDURING RIVER: EDGAR LEE MASTERS' UNCOLLECTED SPOON RIVER POEMS. Selected and With an Introduction by Herbert K. Russell. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991. Pp. 101. $16.95 hardbound.

Thirty-two poems chosen by Professor Russell demonstrate how Edgar Lee Masters persisted for more than a half century in using the countryside and villages of his boyhood effectively as subject matter. In *Spoon River Anthology* (1915-16), which, as Russell notes, is "recognized as a twentieth-century landmark of literature," Masters most memorably combined his regional recollections with brevity in incisive free verse.

Masters found many other poetic occasions to use real local names of places and individuals from middle Illinois, along with events from authentic lives variously obscure or famous. Illustrating the latter are aspects of Lincoln's New Salem years recurring early to late in Masters' cannon. Russell includes such examples as the villonesque "Ballad of Salem Town," probably written about 1890; the colloquial "Squire Bowling Green" (ca. 1921) and the lyrical and mystical "New Salem Hill" (ca. 1935). These poems show how Masters used many moods and modes in versifying, although he certainly will remain best known for the spare free verse of the *Anthology*.

Masters wrote much mediocre verse, but, at his best, there are numerous little-known poems that are "artistically well done and useful biographically," Russell summarizes. Whatever the technique, the poems are frames for things Masters wanted to say—about the human condition, the waning of pioneer virtues and agrarian values, the mysteries of love and nature.

In *Spoon River* he assumed a variety of guises to make often-ironic points. In other middle-Illinois influenced poems such as those gathered by Russell, this deception—a great part of *Spoon River's* appeal—is seldom employed; Masters is plainly the narrator in most of them. However, the selections are, like the content of the most famous work, largely about personalities or places such as many readers may have known in many places, giving them a similar appeal. Russell aims to show "an elegiac side of Masters that will be unfamiliar to many readers," while illustrating "his intellectual diversity and complexity."

It was just as well for prompting readership that the compiler omitted poems dominated by Masters' frequently cantankerous populism and thorny philosophizing. Some regrets could be expressed about omission of several favorites—the lyrical "Meadow Larks," which captures the essence of summer in the region of Masters' boyhood; the shimmering "Song in Late August," a son-to-father tribute; or the dire "Lem Potts," uncollected but well-known locally as a sketch about the regional effects of World War II. But a choice had to be made, and Russell is entitled to his own favorites.

The subtitle chosen for Russell's compilation is somewhat deceptive. All of the poems included were collected in books published during Masters' lifetime, or posthumously, between 1898 and 1976. Manuscript and periodical

sources show that some of them were completed years before they appeared in books. In the biographical sketch, Russell extends Masters' period of residence in Petersburg—he was age four, not one, when the family left a Sand Ridge farm for the nearby county seat. And there were two shorter routes between Petersburg and the Masters farm than the winding bluff road.

With these exceptions, Russell's introduction provides a concisely perceptive summary of Masters' youth in middle Illinois residence and the main influences that remained with him. *The Enduring River* further secures Russell's status as a researcher and interpreter about Masters, his works, and his milieu.

Charles E. Burgess
St. Louis Public Schools

CONTRIBUTORS

MARJORIE RICH BORDNER, who lives in Canton, has been the most well-known Fulton County historian for many years. The author of *Spoon River: History and Festivals* (1983) and the editor of *Fulton County Heritage* (1988), she has lectured widely on Edgar Lee Masters.

CHARLES E. BURGESS, Director of Public Affairs for the St. Louis Public Schools, is a widely published Masters scholar whose articles on the poet have appeared in several publications, including *WIRS* (1984, 1990). He wrote the introduction to the University of Illinois Press edition of Masters' *The Sangamon*.

MARCIA NOE, Associate Professor of English at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, is the author of *Susan Glaspell: Voice from the Heartland* (1983) and various articles on midwestern authors, including Edgar Lee Masters.

HERBERT RUSSELL is Director for College Relations at John A. Logan College. He has written several articles on Edgar Lee Masters and is the editor of a new book, *The Enduring River: Edgar Lee Masters' Uncollected Spoon River Poems*, which is reviewed in this issue.

JULIE SCOTT, who lives in Petersburg, serves on the Board of Directors of the Edgar Lee Masters Memorial Museum, located in that community.